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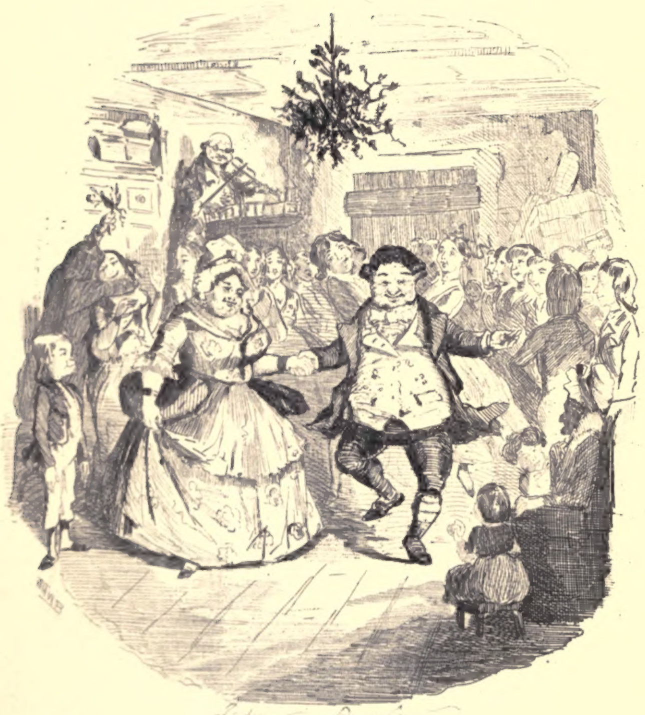

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CHRISTMAS STORIES
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A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

STAVE ONE.

MARLEY'S GHOST.

MARLEY was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it. And Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change for anything he chose to put his hand to.

Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed hand shall not disturb it, or the country's done for. You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and sole mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnized it with an undoubted bargain.

The mention of Marley's funeral brings me back to the point I started from. There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate. If we were not perfectly convinced that Hamlet's father died before the play began, there would be nothing more remarkable in his taking a stroll at night, in an easterly wind, upon his own ramparts, than there would be in any other middle-aged gentleman rashly turning out after dark in a breezy spot—say Saint Paul's Churchyard for instance—literally to astonish his son's weak mind.

Scrooge never painted out old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterward, above the warehouse door: Scrooge & Marley. The firm was known as Scrooge & Marley. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge, and sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names. It was all the same to him.

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shriveled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often "came down" handsomely, and Scrooge never did.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say with gladsome looks, "My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?" No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children asked him what it was o'clock, no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired the way to such and such a place of Scrooge. Even the blind men's dogs appeared to know him; and when they saw him coming on would tug their owners into doorways and up courts; and then would wag their tails as though they said, "No eye at all is better than an evil eye, dark master!"

But what did Scrooge care! It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call "nuts" to Scrooge.

Once upon a time—of all the good days in the year, on Christmas eve—old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people in the court outside go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already—it had not been light all day—and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighboring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms. To see the dingy cloud come drooping down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale.

The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond, a sort of tank, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter and tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of a strong imagination, he failed.

"A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!" cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

"Bah!" said Scrooge, "humbug!"

He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge's, that he was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again.

"Christmas a humbug, uncle!" said Scrooge's nephew. "You don't mean that, I am sure?"

"I do," said Scrooge. "Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough."

"Come, then," returned the nephew gayly. "What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You're rich enough."

Scrooge having no better answer ready on the spur of the moment, said "Bah!" again; and followed it up with "Humbug."

"Don't be cross, uncle!"said the nephew.

"What else can I be," returned the uncle, "when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas! What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? If I could work my will," said Scrooge indignantly, "every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!"

"Uncle!" pleaded the nephew.

"Nephew!" returned the uncle sternly, "keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine."

"Keep it!" repeated Scrooge's nephew. "But you don't keep it."

"Let me leave it alone, then," said Scrooge. "Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!"

"There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say," returned the nephew. "Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good; and I say, God bless it!"

The clerk in the tank involuntarily applauded. Becoming immediately sensible of the impropriety, he poked the fire and extinguished the last frail spark forever.

"Let me hear another sound from you," said Scrooge, "and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation! You're quite a powerful speaker, sir," he added, turning to his nephew. "I wonder you don't go into Parliament."

"Don't be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us tomorrow."

Scrooge said that he would see him—yes, indeed he did. He went the whole length of the expression, and said that he would see him in that extremity first.

"But why?" cried Scrooge's nephew. "Why?"

"Why did you get married?" said Scrooge.

"Because I fell in love."

"Because you fell in love!" growled Scrooge, as if that were the only one thing in the world more ridiculous than a merry Christmas. "Good-afternoon!"

"Nay, uncle, but you never came to see me before that happened. Why give it as a reason for not coming now?"

"Good-afternoon," said Scrooge.

"I want nothing from you; I ask nothing of you; why cannot we be friends?"

"Good-afternoon," said Scrooge.

"I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. We have never had any quarrel, to which I have been a party. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I'll keep my Christmas humor to the last. So a merry Christmas, uncle!"

"Good-afternoon!" said Scrooge.

"And a happy New Year!"

"Good-afternoon!" said Scrooge.

His nephew left the room without an angry word, notwithstanding. He stopped at the outer door to bestow the greetings of the season on the clerk, who, cold as he was, was warmer than Scrooge; for he returned them quite ocrdially.

"There's another fellow," muttered Scrooge, who overheard him: "my clerk, with 15 shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. I'll retire to Bedlam."

This lunatic, in letting Scrooge's nephew out, had let two other people in. They were portly gentlemen, pleasant to behold, and now stood, with their hats off, in

Scrooge's office. They had books and papers in their hands, and bowed to him.

"Scrooge & Marley's, I believe," said one of the gentlemen, referring to his list. "Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge, or Mr. Marley?"

"Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years," Scrooge replied. "He died seven years ago, this very night."

"We have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner," said the gentleman, presenting his credentials.

It certainly was; for they had been two kindred spirits. At the ominous word "liberality," Scrooge frowned and shook his head, and handed the credentials back.

"At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge," said the gentleman, taking up a pen, "it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessaries; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir."

"Are there no prisons?" asked Scrooge.

"Plenty of prisons," said the gentleman, laying down the pen again.

"And the Union workhouses?" demanded Scrooge. "Are they still in operation?"

"They are. Still," returned the gentleman, "I wish I could say they were not."

"The treadmill and the poor law are in full vigor, then?" said Scrooge.

"Both very busy, sir."

"Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course," said Scrooge. "I'm very glad to hear it."

"Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude," returned the gentleman, "a few of us are endeavoring to raise a fund to buy the poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when want is keenly felt, and abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?"

"Nothing!" Scrooge replied.

"You wish to be anonymous?"

"I wish to be left alone," said Scrooge. "Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned—they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there."

"Many can't go there; and many would rather die."

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Besides—excuse me—I don't know that."

"But you might know it," observed the gentleman.

"It's not my business," Scrooge returned. "It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly. Good-afternoon, gentlemen!"

Seeing clearly that it would be useless to pursue their point, the gentlemen withdrew. Scrooge resumed his labors with an improved opinion of himself, and in a more facetious temper than was usual with him.

Meanwhile the fog and darkness thickened so that people ran about with flaring links, proffering their services to go before horses in carriages, and conduct them on their way. The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slyly down at Scrooge out of a Gothic window in the wall, became invisible, and struck the hours and quarters in the clouds with tremulous vibrations afterward as if its teeth were chattering in its frozen head up there. The cold became intense. In the main street, at the corner of the court, some laborers were repairing the gas-pipes, and had lighted a great fire in a brazier round which a party of ragged men and boys were gathered: warming their hands and winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture. The water-plug being left in solitude, its overflowings sullenly congealed and turned to misanthropic ice. The brightness of the shops where holly sprigs and berries crackled in the lamp heat of the windows made pale faces ruddy as they passed. Poulterers' and grocers' trades became a splendid joke: a glorious pageant, with which it was next to impossible to believe that such dull principles as bargain and sale had anything to do. The lord mayor, in the stronghold of the mighty Mansion House, gave orders to his fifty cooks and butlers to keep Christmas as a lord mayor's household should; and even the little tailor, whom he had fined 5 shillings on the previous Monday for being drunk and bloodthirsty in the streets, stirred up to-morrow's pudding in his garret, while his lean wife and the baby sallied out to buy the beef.

Foggier yet, and colder! Piercing, searching, biting cold. If the good Saint Dunstan had but nipped the Evil Spirit's nose with a touch of such weather as that, instead of using his familiar weapons, then indeed he would have roared to lusty purpose. The owner of one scant young nose, gnawed and mumbled by the hungry cold as bones are gnawed by dogs, stooped down at Scrooge's keyhole to regale him with a Christmas carol: but at the first sound of

"God bless you, merry gentleman!
May nothing you dismay!"

Scrooge seized the ruler with such energy of action that the singer fled in terror, leaving the keyhole to the fog and even more congenial frost.

At length the hour of shutting up the counting-house arrived. With an ill-will Scrooge dismounted from his stool and tacitly admitted the fact to the expectant clerk in the tank, who instantly snuffed his candle out and put on his hat.

"You'll want all day to-morrow, I suppose?" said Scrooge.

"If quite convenient, sir."

"It's not convenient," said Scrooge, "and it's not fair. If I was to stop half a crown for it, you'd think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound?"

The clerk smiled faintly.

"And yet," said Scrooge, "you don't think me ill-used, when I pay a day's wages for no work."

The clerk observed that it was only once a year.

"A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!" said Scrooge, buttoning his great-coat to the chin. "But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning."

The clerk promised that he would; and Scrooge walked out with a growl. The office was closed in a twinkling, and the clerk, with the long ends of his white comforter dangling below his waist (for he boasted no great-coat), went down a slide on Cornhill, at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times, in honor of its being Christmas eve, and then ran home to Camden Town as hard as he could pelt, to play at blindman's-buff.

Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern; and having read all the newspapers, and beguiled the rest of the evening with his banker's book, went home to bed. He lived in chambers which had once belonged to his deceased partner. They were a gloomy suit of rooms, in a lowering pile of building up a yard, where it had so little business to be that one could scarcely help fancying that it must have run there when it was a young house, playing at hide-and-seek with other houses, and forgotten the way out again. It was old enough now, and dreary enough, for nobody lived in it but Scrooge, the other rooms being all let out as offices. The yard was so dark that even Scrooge, who knew its every stone, was fain to grope with his hands. The fog and frost so hung about the black old gateway of the house that it seemed as if the genius of the weather sat in mournful meditation on the threshold.

Now, it is a fact that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door, except that it was very large. It is also a fact that Scrooge had seen it night and morning, during his whole residence in that place; also that Scrooge had as little of what is called fancy about him as any man in the city of London, even including—which is a bold word—the corporation, aldermen, and livery. Let it also be borne in mind that Scrooge had not bestowed one thought on Marley since his last mention of his seven-years'-dead partner that afternoon. And then let any man explain to me, if he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker, without its undergoing any intermediate process of change—not a knocker, but Marley's face.

Marley's face. It was not in impenetrable shadow as the other objects in the yard were, but had a dismal light about it, like a bad lobster in a dark cellar. It was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look: with ghostly spectacles turned up on its ghostly forehead. The hair was curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot air; and though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless. That, and its livid color, made it horrible; but its horror seemed to be in spite of the face and beyond its control, rather than a part of its own expression.

As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again.

To say that he was not startled, or that his blood was not conscious of a terrible sensation to which it had been a stranger from infancy, would be untrue. But he put his hand upon the key he had relinquished, turned it sturdily, walked in, and lighted his candle.

He did pause, with a moment's irresolution, before he shut the door; and he did look cautiously behind at first, as if he half-expected to be terrified with the sight of Marley's pigtail sticking out into the hall. But there was nothing on the back of the door except the screws and nuts that held the knocker on, so he said, "Pooh! pooh!" and closed it with a bang.

The sound resounded through the house like thunder. Every room above and every cask in the wine merchant's cellars below appeared to have a separate peal of echoes of its own. Scrooge was not a man to be frightened by echoes. He fastened the door and walked across the hall, and up the stairs; slowly too, trimming his candle as he went.

You may talk vaguely about driving a coach-and-six up a good old flight of stairs, or through a bad young act of Parliament; but I mean to say you might have got a hearse up that staircase, and taken it broadwise, with the splinter-bar toward the wall and the door toward the balustrades: and done it easy. There was plenty of width for that, and room to spare; which is perhaps the reason why Scrooge thought he saw a locomotive hearse going on before him in the gloom. Half a dozen gas lamps out of the street wouldn't have lighted the entry too well, so you may suppose that it was pretty dark with Scrooge's dip.

Up Scrooge went, not caring a button for that. Darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it. But before he shut his heavy door he walked through his rooms to see that all was right. He had just enough recollection of the face to desire to do that.

Sitting-room, bed-room, lumber-room. All as they should be. Nobody under the table, nobody under the sofa; a small fire in the grate; spoon and basin ready; and the little saucepan of gruel (Scrooge had a cold in his head) upon the hob. Nobody under the bed; nobody in the closet, nobody in his dressing-gown, which was hanging up in a suspicious attitude against the wall. Lumber-room as usual. Old fire-guard, old shoes, two fish-baskets, washing-stand on three legs, and a poker.

Quite satisfied, he closed his door and locked himself in; double-locked himself in, which was not his custom. Thus secured against surprise, he took off his cravat; put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and his night-cap; and sat down before the fire to take his gruel.

It was a very low fire indeed; nothing on such a bitter night. He was obliged to sit close to it and brood over it before he could extract the least sensation of warmth from such a handful of fuel. The fireplace was an old one, built by some Dutch merchant long ago, and paved all round with quaint Dutch tiles, designed to illustrate the Scriptures. There were Cains and Abels, Pharaoh's daughters, Queens of Sheba, angelic messengers descending through the air on clouds like feather-beds, Abrahams, Belshazzars, apostles putting off to sea in butter-boats, hundreds of figures to attract his thoughts; and yet that face of Marley, seven years dead, came like the ancient prophet's rod, and swallowed up the whole. If each smooth tile had been a blank at first, with power to shape some picture on its surface from the disjointed fragments of his thoughts, there would have been a copy of old Marley's head on every one.

"Humbug!" said Scrooge; and walked across the room.

After several turns he sat down again. As he threw his head back in the chair his glance happened to rest upon a bell, a disused bell, that hung in the room, and communicated for some purpose now forgotten with a chamber in the highest story of the building. It was with great astonishment, and with a strange, inexplicable dread, that as he looked he saw this bell begin to swing. It swung so softly in the outset that it scarcely made a sound; but soon it rang out loudly, and so did every bell in the house.

This might have lasted half a minute or a minute, but it seemed an hour. The bells ceased as they had begun, together. They were succeeded by a clanking noise, deep down below; as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine merchant's cellar.

Scrooge then remembered to have heard that ghosts in haunted houses were described as dragging chains.

The cellar-door flew open with a booming sound, and then he heard the noise much louder on the floors below; then coming straight up the stairs; then coming toward his door.

"It's humbug still!" said Scrooge. "I won't believe it."

His color changed, though, when, without a pause, it came on through the heavy door and passed into the room before his eyes. Upon its coming in the dying flame leaped up as though it cried, "I know him; Marley's ghost!" and fell again.

The same face: the very same. Marley in his pigtail, usual waistcoat, tights and boots; the tassels on the latter bristling, like his pigtail, and his coat-skirts, and the hair upon his head. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it was made (for Scrooge observed it closely) of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent: so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind.

Scrooge had often heard it said that Marley had no bowels, but he had never believed it until now.

No, nor did he believe it even now. Though he looked the phantom through and through, and saw it standing before him; though he felt the chilling influence of his death-cold eyes; and marked the very texture of the folded kerchief bound about its head and chin, which wrapper he had not observed before, he was still incredulous, and fought against his senses.

"How now!" said Scrooge, caustic and cold as ever. "What do you want with me?"

"Much!" Marley's voice, no doubt about it.

"Who are you?"

"Ask me who I *was*."

"Who *were* you, then?" said Scrooge, raising his voice. 'You're particular, for a shade." He was going to say "*to* a shade," but substituted this as more appropriate.

"In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley."

"Can you—can you sit down?" asked Scrooge, looking doubtfully at him.

"I can."

"Do it, then."

Scrooge asked the question because he didn't know whether a ghost so transparent might find himself in a condition to take a chair; and felt that in the event of its being impossible, it might involve the necessity of an embarrassing explanation. But the ghost sat down on the opposite side of the fireplace, as if he were quite used to it.

"You don't believe in me," observed the ghost.

"I don't," said Scrooge.

"What evidence would you have of my reality beyond that of your senses?"

"I don't know," said Scrooge.

"Why do you doubt your senses?"

"Because," said Scrooge, "a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!"

Scrooge was not much in the habit of cracking jokes, nor did he feel, in his heart, by any means waggish then. The truth is that he tried to be smart as a means of distracting his own attention, and keeping down his terror; for the specter's voice disturbed the very marrow in his bones.

To sit, staring at those fixed glazed eyes, in silence for a moment, would play, Scrooge felt, the very deuce with him. There was something very awful, too, in the specter's being provided with an infernal atmosphere of its own. Scrooge could not feel it himself, but this was clearly the case; for though the ghost sat perfectly motionless, its hair, and skirts, and tassels were still agitated as by the hot vapor from an oven.

"You see this toothpick?" said Scrooge, returning quickly to the charge, for the reason just assigned; and wishing, though it were only for a second, to divert the vision's stony gaze from himself.

"I do," replied the ghost.

"You are not looking at it," said Scrooge.

"But I see it," said the ghost, "notwithstanding."

"Well!" returned Scrooge, "I have but to swallow this, and be for the rest of my days persecuted by a legion of goblins, all of my own creation. Humbug, I tell you! humbug!"

At this the spirit raised a frightful cry, and shook its chain with such a dismal and appalling noise that Scrooge held on tight to his chair to save himself from falling in a swoon. But how much greater was his horror when the phantom taking off the bandage round its head, as if it were too warm to wear indoors, its lower jaw dropped down upon its breast!

Scrooge fell upon his knees, and clasped his hands before his face.

"Mercy!" he said. "Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?"

"Man of the worldly mind!" replied the ghost, "do you believe in me or not?"

"I do," said Scrooge. "I must. But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me?"

"It is required of every man," the ghost returned, "that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not go forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world—oh, woe is me!—and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!"

Again the specter raised a cry, and shook its chain and wrung its shadowy hands.

"You are fettered," said Scrooge, trembling. "Tell me why."

"I wear the chain I forged in life," replied the ghost. "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to *you?*"

Scrooge trembled more and more.

"Or would you know," pursued the ghost, "the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this seven Christmas eves ago. You have labored on it since. It is a ponderous chain!"

Scrooge glanced about him on the floor in the expectation of finding himself surrounded by some fifty or sixty fathoms of iron cable; but he could see nothing.

"Jacob," he said imploringly. "Old Jacob Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me, Jacob!"

"I have none to give," the ghost replied. "It comes from other regions, Ebenezer Scrooge, and is conveyed by other ministers, to other kinds of men. Nor can I tell you what I would. A very little more is all permitted to me. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house—mark me!—in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole; and weary journeys lie before me!"[4]

It was a habit with Scrooge, whenever he became thoughtful, to put his hands in his breeches pockets. Pondering on what the ghost had said he did so now, but without lifting up his eyes or getting off his knees.

"You must have been very slow about it, Jacob," Scrooge observed in a business-like manner, though with humility and deference

"Slow!" the ghost repeated.

"Seven years dead," mused Scrooge. "And traveling all the time!"

"The whole time," said the ghost. "No rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse."

"You travel fast?" said Scrooge.

"On the wings of the wind," replied the ghost.

"You might have got over a great quantity of ground in seven years," said Scrooge.

The ghost on hearing this set up another cry and clanked its chain so hideously in the dead silence of the night that the ward would have been justified in indicting it for a nuisance.

"Oh! captive, bound and double-ironed," cried the phantom, "not to know that ages of incessant labor by immortal creatures for this earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed. Not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness. Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused! Yet such was I! Oh! such was I!"

"But you were always a good man of business, Jacob," faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.

"Business!" cried the ghost, wringing its hands again. "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!"

It held up its chain at arm's length, as if that were the cause of all its unavailing grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again.

"At this time of the rolling year," the specter said, "I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed star which led the wise men to a poor abode? Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted *me?*"

Scrooge was very much dismayed to hear the specter going on at this rate and began to quake exceedingly.

"Hear me!" cried the ghost. "My time is nearly gone."

"I will," said Scrooge. "But don't be hard upon me! Don't be flowery, Jacob! Pray!"

"How it is that I appear before you in a shape that you can see I may not tell. I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day."

It was not an agreeable idea. Scrooge shivered and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"That is no light part of my penance," pursued the ghost. "I am here to-night to warn you that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer."

"You were always a good friend to me," said Scrooge. "Thank'ee!"

"You will be haunted," resumed the ghost, "by three spirits."

Scrooge's countenance fell almost as low as the ghost's had done.

"Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?" he demanded in a faltering voice.

"It is."

"I—I think I'd rather not," said Scrooge.

"Without their visits," said the ghost, "you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first to-morrow, when the bell tolls one."

"Couldn't I take 'em all at once, and have it over, Jacob?" hinted Scrooge.

"Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third upon the next night when the last stroke of twelve has ceased to vibrate. Look to see no more; and look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us!"

When it had said these words the specter took its wrapper from the table and bound it round its head as before. Scrooge knew this by the smart sound its teeth made when the jaws were brought together by the bandage. He ventured to raise his eyes again and found his supernatural visitor confronting him in an erect attitude, with its chain wound over and about its arm.

The apparition walked backward from him; and at every step it took the window raised itself a little, so that when the specter reached it, it was wide open.

It beckoned Scrooge to approach, which he did. When they were within two paces of each other, Marley's ghost held up its hand, warning him to come no nearer. Scrooge stopped.

Not so much in obedience as in surprise and fear: for on the raising of the hand he became sensible of confused noises in the air; incoherent sounds of lamentation and regret; wailings inexpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory. The specter, after listening for a moment, joined in the mournful dirge; and floated out upon the bleak, dark night.

Scrooge followed to the window, desperate in his curiosity. He looked out.

The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's ghost; some few (they might be guilty governments) were linked together; none were free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. He had been quite familiar with one old ghost, in a white waistcoat with a monstrous iron safe attached to its ankle, who cried piteously at being unable to assist a wretched woman with an infant, whom it saw below, upon a door-step. The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power forever.

Whether these creatures faded into mist or mist enshrouded them, he could not tell. But they and their spirit voices faded together; and the night became as it had been when he walked home.

Scrooge closed the window, and examined the door by which the ghost had entered. It was double-locked, as he had locked it with his own hands, and the bolts were undisturbed. He tried to say "Humbug!" but stopped at the first syllable. And being, from the emotion he had undergone, or the fatigues of the day, or his glimpse of the invisible world, or the dull conversation of the ghost, or the lateness of the hour, much in need of repose, went straight to bed without undressing, and fell asleep upon the instant.

STAVE TWO.

THE FIRST OF THE THREE SPIRITS

WHEN Scrooge awoke it was so dark that looking out of bed he could scarcely distinguish the transparent window from the opaque walls of his chamber. He was endeavoring to pierce the darkness with his ferret eyes when the chimes of a neighboring church struck the four quarters. So he listened for the hour.

To his great astonishment the heavy bell went on from six to seven, and from seven to eight, and regularly up to twelve; then stopped. Twelve! It was past two when he went to bed. The clock was wrong. An icicle must have got into the works. Twelve!

He touched the spring of his repeater, to correct this most preposterous clock. Its rapid little pulse beat twelve and stopped.

"Why, it isn't possible," said Scrooge, "that I can have slept through a whole day and far into another night. It isn't possible that anything has happened to the sun, and this is twelve at noon!"

The idea being an alarming one, he scrambled out of bed and groped his way to the window. He was obliged to rub the frost off with the sleeve of his dressing-gown before he could see anything; and could see very little then. All he could make out was that it was still very foggy and extremely cold, and that there was no noise of people running to and fro, and making a great stir, as there unquestionably would have been if night had beaten off bright day and taken possession of the world. This was a great relief, because "three days after sight of this first of exchange pay to Mr. Ebenezer Scrooge or his order," and so forth, would have become a mere United States security if there were no days to count by.

Scrooge went to bed again, and thought, and thought, and thought it over and over and over, and could make nothing of it. The more he thought, the more perplexed he was; and the more he endeavored not to think, the more he thought.

Marley's ghost bothered him exceedingly. Every time he resolved within himself, after mature inquiry, that it was all a dream, his mind flew back again, like a strong spring released to its first position, and presented the same problem to be worked all through, "Was it a dream or not?"

Scrooge lay in this state until the chime had gone three-quarters more, when he remembered, on a sudden, that the ghost had warned him of a visitation when the bell tolled one. He resolved to lie awake until the hour was passed; and considering that he could no more go to sleep than go to heaven, this was perhaps the wisest resolution in his power.

The quarter was so long that he was more than once convinced he must have sunk into a doze unconsciously, and missed the clock. At length it broke upon his listening ear.

"Ding, dong!"

"A quarter past," said Scrooge, counting.

"Ding, dong!"

"Half-past!" said Scrooge.

"Ding, dong!"

"A quarter to it," said Scrooge.

"Ding, dong!"

"The hour itself," said Scrooge triumphantly, "and nothing else!"

He spoke before the hour bell sounded, which it now did with a deep, dull, hollow, melancholy ONE. Light flashed up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed were drawn.

The curtains of his bed were drawn aside, I tell you, by a hand. Not the curtains at his feet, nor the curtains at his back, but those to which his face was addressed. The curtains of his bed were drawn aside; and Scrooge, starting up into a half-recumbent attitude, found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them: as close to it as I am now to you, and I am standing in the spirit at your elbow.

It was a strange figure—like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium, which gave him the appearance of having receded from the view, and being diminished to a child's proportions. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin. The arms were very long and muscular; the hands the same, as if its hold were of uncommon strength. Its legs and feet, most delicately formed, were, like those upper members, bare. It wore a tunic of the purest white; and round its waist was bound a lustrous belt, the sheen of which was beautiful. It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand; and, in singular contradiction of that wintry emblem, had its dress trimmed with summer flowers. But the strangest thing about it was that from the crown of its head there sprang a bright clear jet of light, by which all this was visible; and which was doubtless the occasion of its using, in its duller moments, a great extinguisher for a cap, which it now held under its arm

Even this, though, when Scrooge looked at it with increasing steadiness, was *not* its strangest quality. For as its belt sparkled and glittered now in one part and now in another, and what was light one instant at another time was dark, so the figure itself fluctuated in its distinctness; being now a thing with one arm, now with one leg, now with twenty legs, now a pair of legs without a head, now a head without a body: of which dissolving parts no outline would be visible in the dense gloom wherein they melted away. And in the very wonder of this, it would be itself again, distinct and clear as ever.

"Are you the spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me?" asked Scrooge.

"I am!"

The voice was soft and gentle. Singularly low, as if instead of being so close beside him it were at a distance.

"Who and what are you?" Scrooge demanded.

"I am the ghost of Christmas past."

"Long past?" inquired Scrooge, observant of its dwarfish stature.

"No. Your past."

Perhaps Scrooge could not have told anybody why, if anybody could have asked him, but he had a special desire to see the spirit in his cap, and begged him to be covered.

"What!" exclaimed the ghost, "would you so soon put out, with worldly hands, the light I give? Is it not enough that you are one of those whose passions made this cap, and force me through whole trains of years to wear it low upon my brow?'

Scrooge reverently disclaimed all intention to offend or any knowledge of having willfully "bonneted" the spirit at any period of his life. He then made bold to inquire what business brought him there.

"Your welfare!" said the ghost.

Scrooge expressed himself much obliged, but could not help thinking that a night of unbroken rest would have been more conducive to that end.

The spirit must have heard him thinking, for it said immediately:

"Your reclamation, then. Take heed!"

It put out its strong hand as it spoke and clasped him gently by the arm.

"Rise! and walk with me!"

It would have been in vain for Scrooge to plead that the air was freezing; that he was clad but lightly in his slippers, dressing-gown, and nightcap; and that he had a cold upon him at that time. The grasp, though gentle as a woman's hand, was not to be resisted. He rose: but finding that the spirit made towards the window, clasped his robe in supplication.

"I am a mortal," Scrooge remonstrated, "and liable to fall."

"Bear but a touch of my hand *there*," said the spirit, laying it upon his heart, "and you shall be upheld in more than this!"

As the words were spoken they passed through the wall and stood upon an open country road, with fields on either hand. The city had entirely vanished. Not a vestige of it was to be seen. The darkness and the mist had vanished with it, for it was a clear, cold winter day, with snow upon the ground.

"Good Heaven!" said Scrooge, clasping his hands together as he looked about him. "I was bred in this place. I was a boy here!"

The spirit gazed upon him mildly. Its gentle touch, though it had been light and instantaneous, appeared still present to the old man's sense of feeling. He was conscious of a thousand odors floating in the air, each one connected with a thousand thoughts, and hopes, and joys, and cares long, long forgotten!

"Your lip is trembling," said the ghost. "And what is that upon your cheek?"

Scrooge muttered, with an unusual catching in his voice, that it was a pimple; and begged the ghost to lead him where he would.

"You recollect the way?" inquired the spirit.

"Remember it!" cried Scrooge with fervor; "I could walk it blindfold."

"Strange to have forgotten it for so many years!" observed the ghost. "Let us go on."

They walked along the road, Scrooge recognizing every gate, and post, and tree; until a little market-town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church, and winding river. Some shaggy ponies now were seen trotting toward them with boys upon their backs, who called to other boys in country gigs and carts, driven by farmers. All these boys were in great spirits, and shouted to each other until the broad fields were so full of merry music that the crisp air laughed to hear it.

"These are but shadows of the things that have been," said the ghost. "They have no consciousness of us."

The jocund travelers came on; and as they came Scrooge knew and named them every one. Why was he rejoiced beyond all bounds to see them! Why did his cold eye glisten, and his heart leap up as they went past! Why was he filled with gladness when he heard them give each other merry Christmas as they parted at cross-roads and by-ways for their several homes! What was merry Christmas to Scrooge? Out upon merry Christmas! What good had it ever done to him?

"The school is not quite deserted," said the ghost. "A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still."

Scrooge said he knew it. And he sobbed.

They left the high-road by a well-remembered lane and soon approached a mansion of dull red brick, with a little weathercock-surmounted cupola on the roof, and a bell hanging in it. It was a large house, but one of broken fortunes; for the spacious offices were little used, their walls were damp and mossy, their windows broken, and their gates decayed. Fowls clucked and strutted in the stables; and the coach houses and sheds were overrun with grass. Not was it more retentive of its ancient state within; for entering the dreary hall, and glancing through the open doors of many rooms, they found them poorly furnished, cold, and vast. There was an earthy savor in the air, a chilly barenness in the place, which associated itself somehow with too much getting up by candle-light and not too much to eat.

They went, the ghost and Scrooge, across the hall, to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them, and disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by lines of plain deal forms and desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire; and Scrooge sat down upon a form and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be.

Not a latent echo in the house, not a squeak and scuffle from the mice behind the paneling, not a drip from the half-thawed water-spout in the dull yard behind, not a sigh among the leafless boughs of one despondent poplar, not the idle swinging of an empty store-house door, no, not a clicking in the fire, but fell upon the head of Scrooge with a softening influence and gave a freer passage to his tears.

The spirit touched him on the arm and pointed to his younger self, intent upon his reading. Suddenly a man in foreign garments, wonderfully real and disinct to look at, stood outside the window, with an ax stuck in his belt, and leading by the bridle an ass laden with wood.

"Why, it's Ali Baba!" Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy. "It's dear old honest Ali Baba! Yes, yes, I know! One Christmas time, when yonder solitary child was left here all alone, he *did* come, for the first time, just like that. Poor boy! And Valentine," said Scrooge, "and his wild brother, Orson; there they go! And what's his name, who was put down in his drawers, asleep, at the Gate of Damascus; don't you see him? And the sultan's groom turned upside down by the genii; there he is upon his head! Serve him right. I'm glad of it. What business had *he* to be married to the princess!"

To hear Scrooge expending all the earnestness of his nature on such subjects in a most extraordinary voice between laughing and crying, and to see his heightened and excited face, would have been a surprise to his business friends in the city, indeed.

"There's the parrot!" cried Scrooge. "Green body and yellow tail, with a thing like a lettuce growing out of the top of his head; there he is! Poor Robin Crusoe, he called him, when he came home again after sailing round the island. 'Poor Robin Crusoe, where have you been, Robin Crusoe?' The man thought he was dreaming, but he wasn't. It was the parrot, you know. There goes Friday, running for his life to the little creek! Halloo! Hoop! Halloo!"

Then, with a rapidity of transition very foreign to his usual character, he said in pity for his former self, "Poor boy!" and cried again.

"I wish," Scrooge muttered, putting his hand in his pocket and looking about him, after drying his eyes with his cuff: "but it's too late now."

"What is the matter?" asked the spirit.

"Nothing," said Scrooge. "Nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something: that's all."

The ghost smiled thoughtfully and waved its hand, saying as it did so, "Let us see another Christmas!"

Scrooge's former self grew larger at the words, and the room became a little darker and more dirty. The panels shrank, the windows cracked; fragments of plaster fell out of the ceiling, and the naked laths were shown instead; but how all this was brought about, Scrooge knew no more than you do. He only knew that it was quite correct; that everything had happened so; that there he was, alone again, when all the other boys had gone home for the jolly holidays.

He was not reading now, but walking up and down despairingly. Scrooge looked at the ghost, and with a mournful shaking of his head glanced anxiously toward the door.

It opened; and a little girl, much younger than the boy, came darting in, and putting her arms about his neck, and often kissing him, addressed him as her "dear, dear brother."

"I have come to bring you home, dear brother!" said the child, clapping her tiny hands, and bending down to laugh. "To bring you home, home, home!"

"Home, little Fan?" returned the boy.

"Yes!" said the child, brimful of glee. "Home for good and all. Home, forever and ever. Father is so much kinder than he used to be that home's like heaven! He spoke so gently to me one dear night when I was going to bed that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home; and he said yes, you should; and sent me in a coach to bring you. And you're to be a man!" said the child, opening her eyes, "and are never to come back here; but first, we're to be together all the Christmas long, and have the merriest time in all the world."

"You are quite a woman, little Fan!" exclaimed the boy.

She clapped her hands and laughed, and tried to touch his head; but being too little, laughed again, and stood on tiptoe to embrace him. Then she began to drag him, in her childish eagerness, toward the door; and he, nothing loath to go, accompanied her.

A terrible voice in the hall cried, "Bring down Master Scrooge's box, there!" and in the hall appeared the schoolmaster himself, who glared on Master Scrooge with a ferocious condescension, and threw him into a dreadful state of mind by shaking hands with him. He then conveyed him and his sister into the veriest old well of a shivering best parlor that ever was seen, where the maps upon the wall and the celestial and terrestrial globes in the windows were waxy with cold. Here he produced a decanter of curiously light wine, and a block of curiously heavy cake, and administered installments of those dainties to the young people: at the same time sending out a meager servant to offer a glass of "something" to the postboy, who answered that he thanked the gentleman, but if it was the same tap as he had tasted before, he had rather not. Master Scrooge's trunk being by this time tied on to the top of the chaise, the children bade the schoolmaster good-by right willingly; and getting into it drove gayly down the garden sweep; the quick wheels dashing the hoar-frost and snow from off the dark leaves of the evergreens like spray.

"Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered," said the ghost. "But she had a large heart!"

"So she had," cried Scrooge. "You're right. I will not gainsay it, spirit. God forbid!'

"She died a woman," said the ghost, "and had, as I think, children."

"One child," Scrooge returned.

"True," said the ghost. "Your nephew!"

Scrooge seemed uneasy in his mind; and answered briefly, "Yes."

Although they had but that moment left the school behind them, they were now in the busy thoroughfares of a city, where shadowy passengers passed and repassed; where shadowy carts and coaches battled for the way, and all the strife and tumult of a real city were. It was made plain enough by the dressing of the shops that here too it was Christmas time again; but it was evening, and the streets were lighted up.

The ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door, and asked Scrooge if he knew it.

"Know it!" said Scrooge. "Was I apprenticed here!"

They went in. At sight of an old gentleman in a Welsh wig, sitting behind such a high desk that if he had been two inches taller he must have knocked his head against the ceiling, Scrooge cried in great excitement:

"Why, it's old Fezziwig! Bless his heart; it's Fezziwig alive again!"

Old Fezziwig laid down his pen and looked up at the clock, which pointed to the hour of seven. He rubbed his hands; adjusted his capacious waistcoat; laughed all over himself from his shoes to his organ of benevolence; and called out in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice:

"Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!"

Scrooge's former self, now grown a young man, came briskly in, accompanied by his fellow-'prentice.

"Dick Wilkins, to be sure!" said Scrooge to the ghost. "Bless me, yes. There he is. He was very much attached to me, was Dick. Poor Dick! Dear, dear!"

"Yo ho, my boys!" said Fezziwig. "No more work to-night. Christmas eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer! Let's have the shutters up," cried old Fezziwig with a sharp clap of his hands, "before a man can say Jack Robinson!"

You wouldn't believe how those two fellows went at it! They charged into the street with the shutters—one, two, three—had 'em up in their places—four, five, six—barred 'em and pinned 'em—seven, eight, nine—and came back before you could have got to twelve, panting like race-horses.

"Hilli-ho!" cried old Fezziwig, skipping down from the high desk with wonderful agility. "Clear away, my lads, and let's have lots of room here! Hilli-ho, Dick! Chirrup, Ebenezer!"

Clear away! There was nothing they wouldn't have cleared away, or couldn't have cleared away, with old Fezziwig looking on. It was done in a minute. Every movable was packed off, as if it were dismissed from public life for evermore; the floor was swept and watered, the lamps were trimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire; and the warehouse was as snug, and warm, and dry, and bright a ball-room as you would desire to see upon a winter's night.

In came a fiddler with a music-book, and went up to the lofty desk, and made an orchestra of it, and tuned like fifty stomach-aches. In came Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile. In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming and lovable. In came the six young followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and women employed in the business. In came the housemaid, with her cousin, the baker. In came the cook, with her brother's particular friend, the milkman. In came the boy from over the way, who was suspected of not having board enough from his master; trying to hide himself behind the girl from next door but one, who was proved to have had her ears pulled by her mistress. In they all came, one after another; some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some pushing, some pulling; in they all came, anyhow and everyhow. Away they all went, twenty couple at once; hands half-round and back again the other way; down the middle and up again; round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping; old top couple always turning up in the wrong place; new top couple starting off again as soon as they got there; all top couples at last, and not a bottom one to help them! When this result was brought about old Fezziwig, clapping his hands to stop the dance, cried out, "Well done!" and the fiddler plunged his hot face into a pot of porter especially provided for that purpose. But scorning rest, upon his reappearance he instantly began again, though there were no dancers yet, as if the other fiddler had been carried home, exhausted, on a shutter, and he were a brand-new man resolved to beat him out of sight or perish.

There were more dances, and there were forfeits, and more dances, and there was cake, and there was negus, and there was a great piece of cold roast, and there was a great piece of cold boiled, and there were mince pies and plenty of beer. But the great effect of the evening came after the roast and boiled, when the fiddler (an artful dog, mind! The sort of man who knew his business better than you or I could have told it him!) struck up "Sir Roger de Coverley." Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. Top couple, too; with a good stiff piece of work cut out for them; twenty-three or twenty-four pair of partners; people who were not to be trifled with; people who would dance and had no notion of walking.

But if they had been twice as many—ah, four times—old Fezziwig would have been a match for them, and so would Mrs. Fezziwig. As to her, she was worthy to be his partner in every sense of the term. If that's not high praise, tell me higher, and I'll use it. A positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig's calves. They shone in every part of the dance like moons. You couldn't have predicted at any given time what would have become of them next. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs. Fezziwig had gone all through the dance, advance and retire, both hands to your partner, bow and courtesy, corkscrew, thread the needle, and back again to your place, Fezziwig "cut"—cut so deftly that he appeared to wink with his legs, and came upon his feet again without a stagger.

When the clock struck eleven this domestic ball broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took their stations, one on either side of the door, and shaking hands with every person individually as he or she went out wished him or her a merry Christmas. When everybody had retired but the two 'prentices they did the same to them; and thus the cheerful voices died away, and the lads were left to their beds, which were under a counter in the back shop.

During the whole of this time Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene and with his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation. It was not until now, when the bright faces of his former self and Dick were turned from them, that he remembered the ghost, and became conscious that it was looking full upon him, while the light upon its head burned very clear.

"A small matter," said the ghost, "to make these silly folks so full of gratitude."

"Small!" echoed Scrooge.

The spirit signed to him to listen to the two apprentices, who were pouring out their hearts in praise of Fezziwig; and when he had done so, said:

"Why! Is it not? He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money: three or four perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?"

"It isn't that," said Scrooge, heated by the remark, and speaking unconsciously like his former, not his latter, self. "It isn't that, spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count 'em up: what then? The happiness he gives is quite as great as if it cost a fortune."

He felt the spirit's glance and stopped.

"What is the matter?" asked the ghost.

"Nothing particular," said Scrooge.

"Something, I think?" the ghost insisted.

"No," said Scrooge. "No, I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now. That's all."

His former self turned down the lamps as he gave utterance to the wish; and Scrooge and the ghost again stood side by side in the open air.

"My time grows short," observed the spirit. "Quick!"

This was not addressed to Scrooge, or to any one whom he could see, but it produced an immediate effect. For again Scrooge saw himself. He was older now; a man in the prime of life. His face had not the harsh and rigid lines of later years; but it had begun to wear the signs of care and avarice. There was an eager, greedy, restless motion in the eye which showed the passion that had taken root and where the shadow of the growing tree would fall.

He was not alone, but sat by the side of a fair young girl in a mourning-dress: in whose eyes there were tears, which sparkled in the light that shone out of the ghost of Christmas past.

"It matters little," she said softly. "To you, very little. Another idol has displaced me; and if it can cheer and comfort you in time to come as I would have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve."

"What idol has displaced you?" he rejoined.

"A golden one."

"This is the even-handed dealing of the world!" he said. "There is nothing on which it is so hard as poverty; and there is nothing it professes to condemn with such severity as the pursuit of wealth!"

"You fear the world too much," she answered gently. "All your other hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond the chance of its sordid reproach. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master-passion, gain, engrosses you. Have I not?"

"What then?" he retorted. "Even if I have grown so much wiser, what then? I am not changed toward you."

She shook her head.

"Am I?"

"Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor and content to be so, until, in good season, we could improve our worldly fortune by our patient industry. You *are* changed. When it was made you were another man."

"I was a boy," he said impatiently.

"Your own feeling tells you that you were not what you are," she returned. "I am. That which promised happiness when we were one in heart is fraught with misery now that we are two. How often and how keenly I have thought of this, I will not say. It is enough that I *have* thought of it, and can release you."

"Have I ever sought release?"

"In words—no. Never."

"In what, then?"

"In a changed nature; in an altered spirit; in another atmosphere of life; another hope as its great end. In everything that made my love of any worth or value in your sight. If this had never been between us," said the girl, looking mildly, but with steadiness, upon him, "tell me, would you seek me out and try to win me now? Ah, no!"

He seemed to yield to the justice of this supposition in spite of himself. But he said with a struggle, "You think not."

"I would gladly think otherwise if I could," she answered, "Heaven knows! When *I* have learned a truth like this I know how strong and irresistible it must be. But if you were free to-day, to-morrow, yesterday, can even I believe that you would choose a dowerless girl—you who, in your very confidence with her, weigh everything by gain: or, choosing her, if for a moment you were false enough to your one guiding principle to do so, do I not know that your repentance and regret would surely follow? I do; and I release you. With a full heart, for the love of him you once were."

He was about to speak; but with her head turned from him, she resumed:

"You may—the memory of what is past makes me hope you will—have pain in this. A very, very brief time, and you will dismiss the recollection of it gladly as an unprofitable dream, from which it happened well that you awoke. May you be happy in the life you have chosen!"

She left him, and they parted.

"Spirit!" said Scrooge, "show me no more. Conduct me home. Why do you delight to torture me?"

"One shadow more!" exclaimed the ghost.

"No more!" cried Scrooge. "No more. I don't wish to see it. Show me no more!"

But the relentless ghost pinioned him in both his arms, and forced him to observe what happened next.

They were in another scene and place; a room not very large or handsome, but full of comfort. Near to the winter fire sat a beautiful young girl, so like that last that Scrooge believed it was the same until he saw *her*, now a comely matron, sitting opposite her daughter. The noise in this room was perfectly tumultuous, for there were more children there than Scrooge in his agitated state of mind could count; and, unlike the celebrated herd in the poem, there were not forty children conducting themselves like one, but every child was conducting itself like forty. The consequences were uproarious beyond belief; but no one seemed to care; on the contrary, the mother and daughter laughed heartily and enjoyed it very much; and the latter, soon beginning to mingle in the sports, got pillaged by the young brigands most ruthlessly. What would I have not given to be one of them! Though I never could have been so rude, no, no! I wouldn't for the wealth of all the world have crushed that braided hair, and torn it down; and for the precious little shoe, I wouldn't have plucked it off, God bless my soul! to save my life. As to measuring her waist in sport as they did, bold young brood, I couldn't have done it; I should have expected my arm to have grown round it for a punishment, and never come straight again. And yet I should have dearly liked, I own, to have touched her lips; to have questioned her, that she might have opened them; to have looked upon the lashes of her downcast eyes, and never raised a blush; to have let loose waves of hair, an inch of which would be a keepsake beyond price: in short, I should have liked, I do confess, to have had the lightest license of a child, and yet to have been man enough to know its value.

But now a knocking at the door was heard, and such a rush immediately ensued that she with laughing face and plundered dress was borne toward it the center of a flushed and boisterous group, just in time to greet the father, who came home attended by a man laden with Christmas toys and presents. Then the shouting and the struggling, and the onslaught that was made on the defenseless porter! The scaling him with chairs for ladders to dive into his pockets, despoil him of brown-paper parcels, hold on tight by his cravat, hug him round his neck, pommel his back, and kick his legs in irrepressible affection! The shouts of wonder and delight with which the development of every package was received! The terrible announcement that the baby had been taken in the act of putting a doll's frying-pan into his mouth, and was more than suspected of having swallowed a fictitious turkey glued on a wooden platter! The immense relief of finding this a false alarm! The joy, and gratitude, and ecstasy! They are all indescribable alike. It is enough that by degrees the children and their emotions got out of the parlor and by one stair at a time up to the top of the house; where they went to bed, and so subsided.

And now Scrooge looked on more attentively than ever, when the master of the house, having his daughter leaning fondly on him, sat down with her and her mother at his own fireside; and when he thought that such another creature, quite as graceful and as full of promise, might have called him father and been a spring-time in the haggard winter of his life, his sight grew very dim indeed.

"Belle," said the husband, turning to his wife with a smile, "I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon."

"Who was it?"

"Guess!"

"How can I? Tut, don't I know?" she added in the same breath, laughing as he laughed. "Mr. Scrooge."

"Mr. Scrooge it was. I passed his office window; and as it was not shut up and he had a candle inside, I could scarcely help seeing him. His partner lies upon the point of death, I hear; and there he sat alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe."

"Spirit!" said Scrooge in a broken voice, "remove me from this place."

"I told you these were shadows of the things that have been," said the ghost. "That they are what they are, do not blame me!"

"Remove me!" Scrooge exclaimed; "I cannot bear it!"

He turned upon the ghost, and seeing that it looked upon him with a face in which in some strange way there were fragments of all the faces it had shown him, wrestled with it.

"Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!"

In the struggle, if that can be called a struggle in which the ghost with no visible resistance on its own part was undisturbed by any effort of its adversary, Scrooge observed that its light was burning high and bright; and dimly connecting that with its influence over him, he seized the extinguisher-cap, and by a sudden action pressed it down upon its head.

The spirit dropped beneath it, so that the extinguisher covered its whole form; but though Scrooge pressed it down with all his force, he could not hide the light, which streamed from under it in an unbroken flood upon the ground.

He was conscious of being exhausted and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness; and, further, of being in his own bedroom. He gave the cap a parting squeeze, in which his hand relaxed; and had barely time to reel to bed before he sank into a heavy sleep.

STAVE THREE.

THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS.

Awaking in the middle of a prodigiously tough snore, and sitting up in bed to get his thoughts together, Scrooge had no occasion to be told that the bell was again upon the stroke of one. He felt that he was restored to consciousness in the right nick of time for the especial purpose of holding a conference with the second messenger dispatched to him through Jacob Marley's intervention. But finding that he turned uncomfortably cold when he began to wonder which of his curtains this new specter would draw back, he put them every one aside with his own hands, and lying down again, established a sharp lookout all round the bed. For he wished to challenge the spirit on the moment of its appearance, and did not wish to be taken by surprise and made nervous.

Gentlemen of the free-and-easy sort, who plume themselves on being acquainted with a move or two, and being usually equal to tne time of day, express the wide range of their capacity for adventure by observing that they are good for anything from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter; between which opposite extremes, no doubt, there lies a tolerably wide and comprehensive range of subjects. Without venturing for Scrooge quite as hardily as this, I don't mind calling on you to believe that he was ready for a good broad field of strange appearances, and that nothing between a baby and a rhinoceros would have astonished him very much.

Now, being prepared for almost anythiung, he was not by any means prepared for nothing; and, consequently, when the bell struck one and no shape appeared, he was taken with a violent fit of trembling. Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour went by, yet nothing came. All this time he lay upon his bed, the very core and center of a blaze of ruddy light, which streamed upon it when the clock proclaimed the hour; and which, being only light, was more alarming than a dozen ghosts, as he was powerless to make out what it meant or would be at; and was sometimes apprehensive that he might be that very moment an interesting case of spontaneous combustion, without having the consolation of knowing it. At last, however, he began to think—as you or I would have thought at first; for it is always the person not in the predicament who knows what ought to have been done in it, and would unquestionably have done it too—at last, I say, he began to think that the source and secret of this ghostly light might be in the adjoining room, from whence, on further tracing it, it seemed to shine. This idea taking full possession of his mind, he got up softly and shuffled in his slippers to the door.

The moment Scrooge's hand was on the lock a strange voice called him by his name and bade him enter. He obeyed.

It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green that it looked a perfect grove, from every part of which bright gleaming berries glistened. The crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe, and ivy reflected back the light as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there; and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney as that dull petrifaction of a hearth had never known in Scrooge's time, or Marley's, or for many and many a winter season gone. Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and seething bowls of punch that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam. In easy state upon this couch there sat a jolly giant, glorious to see; who bore a glowing torch, in ~~shape not unlike Plenty's horn,~~ and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge, as he came peeping round the door.

"Come in!" exclaimed the ghost. "Come in! and know me better, man!"

Scrooge entered timidly, and hung his head before this spirit. He was not the dogged Scrooge he had been; and though the spirit's eyes were clear and kind, he did not like to meet them.

"I am the ghost of Christmas present," said the spirit. "Look upon me!"

Scrooge reverently did so. It was clothed in one simple green robe, or mantle, bordered with white fur. This garment hung so loosely on the figure that its capacious breast was bare, as if disdaining to be warded or concealed by any artifice. Its feet, observable beneath the ample folds of the garment, were also bare; and on its head it wore no other covering than a holly wreath, set here and there with shining icicles. Its dark-brown curls were long and free; free as its genial face, its sparkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its unconstrained demeanor, and its joyful air. Girded round its middle was an antique scabbard; but no sword was in it, and the ancient sheath was eaten up with rust.

"You have never seen the like of me before?" exclaimed the spirit.

"Never," Scrooge made answer to it.

"Have never walked forth with the younger members of my family; meaning (for I am very young) my elder brothers born in these later years?" pursued the phantom.

"I don't think I have," said Scrooge. "I am afraid I have not. Have you had many brothers, spirit?"

"More than eighteen hundred," said the ghost.

"A tremendous family to provide for!" muttered Scrooge.

The ghost of Christmas present rose.

"Spirit," said Scrooge submissively, "conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learned a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it."

"Touch my robe!"

Scrooge did as he was told, and held it fast.

Holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, meat, pigs, sausages, oysters, pies, puddings, fruit, and punch, all vanished instantly. So did the room, the fire, the ruddy glow, the hour of night, and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning, where (for the weather was severe) the people made a rough but brisk and not unpleasant kind of music in scraping the snow from the pavement in front of their dwellings, and from the tops of their houses, whence it was mad delight to the boys to see it come plumping down into the road below, and splitting into artificial little snow-storms.

The house fronts looked black enough, and the windows blacker, contrasting with the smooth white sheet of snow upon the roofs, and with the dirtier snow upon the ground; which last deposit had been plowed up in deep furrows by the heavy wheels of carts and wagons; furrows that crossed and recrossed each other hundreds of times where the great streets branched off; and made intricate channels, hard to trace in the thick yellow mud and icy water. The sky was gloomy, and the shortest streets were choked up with a dingy mist, half-thawed, half-frozen, whose heavier particles descended in a shower of sooty atoms, as if all the chimneys in Great Britain had, by one consent, caught fire, and were blazing away to their dear hearts' content. There was nothing very cheerful in the climate of the town, and yet was there an air of cheerfulness abroad that the clearest summer air and brightest summer sun might have endeavored to diffuse in vain.

For the people who were shoveling away on the housetops were jovial and full of glee; calling out to one another from the parapets, and now and then exchanging a facetious snowball—better-natured missile far than many a wordy jest—laughing heartily if it went right and not less heartily if it went wrong. The poulterers' shops were still half-open, and the fruiterers' were radiant in their glory. There were great, round, pot-bellied baskets of chestnuts, shaped like the waistcoats of jolly old gentlemen, lolling at the doors and tumbling out into the street in their apoplectic opulence. There were ruddy, brown-faced, broad-girthed Spanish onions, shining in the fatness of their growth like Spanish friars, and winking from their shelves in wanton slyness at the girls as they went by and glanced demurely at the hung-up mistletoe. There were pears and apples, clustered high in blooming pyramids; there were bunches of grapes, made, in the shopkeepers' benevolence, to dangle from conspicuous hooks, that people's mouths might water gratis as they passed; there were piles of filberts, mossy and brown, recalling in their fragrance ancient walks among the woods and pleasant shufflings ankle-deep through withered leaves; there were Norfolk biffins, squab and swarthy, setting off the yellow of the oranges and lemons, and in the great compactness of their juicy persons urgently entreating and beseeching to be carried home in paper bags and eaten after dinner. The very gold and silver fish, set forth among these choice fruits in a bowl, though members of a dull and stagnant-blooded race, appeared to know that there was something going on; and, to a fish, went gasping round and round their little world in slow and passionless excitement.

The grocers'! oh, the grocers'! nearly closed, with perhaps two shutters down, or one; but through those gaps such glimpses! It was not alone that the scales descending on the counter made a merry sound, or that the twine and roller parted company so briskly, or that the canisters were rattled up and down like juggling tricks, or even that the blended scents of tea and coffee were so grateful to the nose, or even that the raisins were so plentiful and pure, the almonds so extremely white, the sticks of cinnamon so long and straight, the other spices so delicious, the candied fruits so caked and spotted with molten sugar as to make the coldest lookers-on feel faint and subsequently bilious. Nor was it that the figs were moist and pulpy, or that the French plums blushed in modest tartness from their highly decorated boxes, or that everything was good to eat and in its Christmas dress; but the customers were all so hurried and so eager in the hopeful promise of the day that they tumbled up against each other at the door, crashing their wicker baskets wildly, and left their purchases upon the counter, and came running back to fetch them, and committed hundreds of the like mistakes, in the best humor possible; while the grocer and his people were so frank and fresh that the polished hearts with which they fastened their aprons behind might have been their own, worn outside for general inspection, and for Christmas daws to peck at if they chose.

But soon the steeples called good people all to church and chapel, and away they came, flocking through the streets in their best clothes and with their gayest faces. At the same time there emerged from scores of by-streets, lanes, and nameless turnings innumerable people, carrying their dinners to the bakers' shops. The sight of these poor revelers appeared to interest the spirit very much, for he stood with Scrooge beside him in a baker's doorway, and taking off the covers as their bearers passed, sprinkled incense on their dinners from his torch. And it was a very uncommon kind of torch, for once or twice when there were angry words between some dinner-carriers who had jostled each other, he shed a few drops of water on them from it, and their good humor was restored directly. For they said it was a shame to quarrel upon Christmas Day. And so it was! God love it, so it was!

In time the bells ceased, and the bakers were shut up; and yet there was a genial shadowing forth of all these dinners and the progress of their cooking, in the thawed blotch of wet above each baker's oven; where the pavement smoked as if the stones were cooking too.

"Is there a peculiar flavor in what you sprinkle from your torch?" asked Scrooge.

"There is. My own."

"Would it apply to any kind of dinner on this day?" asked Scrooge.

"To any kindly given. To a poor one most."

"Why to a poor one most?" asked Scrooge.

"Because it needs it most."

"Spirit," said Scrooge after a moment's thought, "I wonder you, of all the beings in the many worlds about us, should desire to cramp these people's opportunities of innocent enjoyment."

"I!" cried the spirit.

"You would deprive them of their means of dining every seventh day, often the only day on which they can be said to dine at all," said Scrooge. "Wouldn't you?"

"I!" cried the spirit.

"You seek to close these places on the seventh day?" said Scrooge. "And it comes to the same thing."

"I seek!" exclaimed the spirit.

"Forgive me if I am wrong. It has been done in your name, or at least in that of your family," said Scrooge.

"There are some upon this earth of yours," returned the spirit, "who lay claim to know us and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us and all our kith and kin as if they had never lived. Remember that, and charge their doings on themselves, not us."

Scrooge promised that he would; and they went on, invisible, as they had been before, into the suburbs of the town. It was a remarkable quality of the ghost (which Scrooge had observed at the baker's) that notwithstanding his gigantic size, he could accommodate himself to any place with ease; and that he stood beneath a low roof quite as gracefully and like a supernatural creature as it was possible he could have done in any lofty hall.

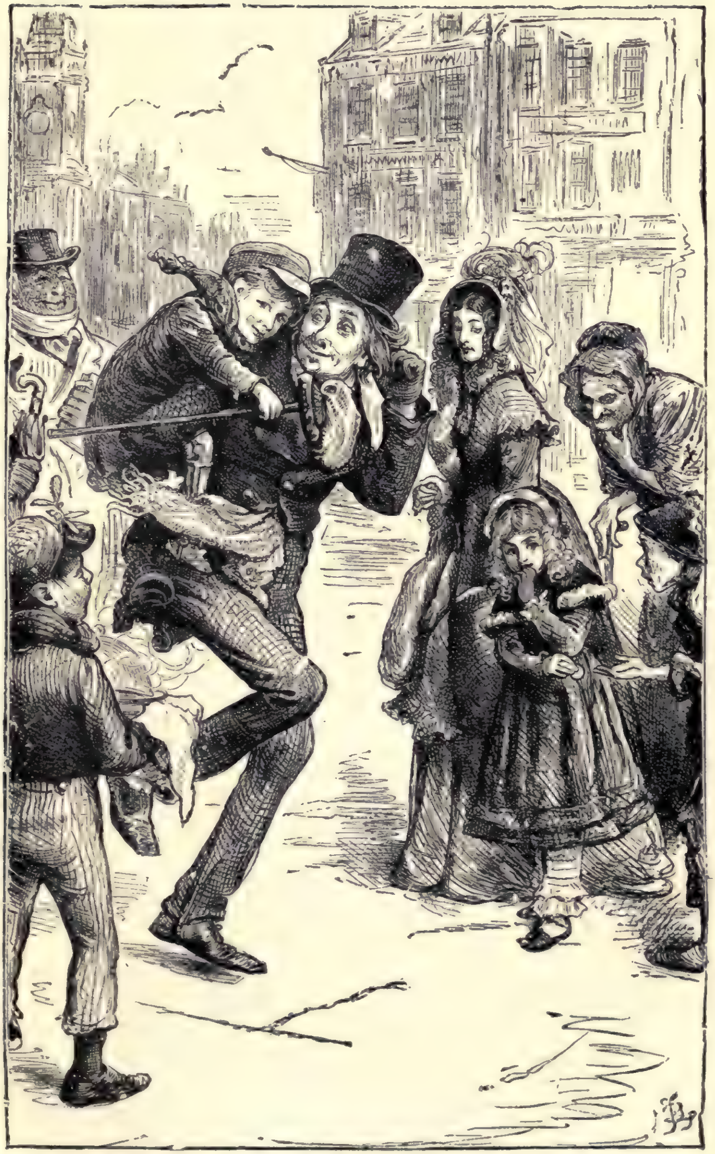
And perhaps it was the pleasure the good spirit had in showing off this power of his, or else it was his own kind, generous, hearty nature and his sympathy with all poor men, that led him straight to Scrooge's clerk's; for there he went, and took Scrooge with him, holding to his robe; and on the threshold of the door the spirit smiled, and stopped to bless Bob Cratchit's dwelling with the sprinklings of his torch. Think of that! Bob had but 15 "bob" a week himself: he pocketed on Saturdays but fifteen copies of his Christian name; and yet the ghost of Christmas present blessed his four-roomed house!

Then up rose Mrs. Cratchit, Cratchit's wife, dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in ribbons, which are cheap and make a goodly show for sixpence; and she laid the cloth, assisted by Belinda Cratchit, second of her daughters, also brave in ribbons; while Master Peter Cratchit plunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes, and getting the corners of his monstrous shirt collar (Bob's private property, conferred upon his son and heir in honor of the day) into his mouth, rejoiced to find himself so gallantly attired, and yearned to show his linen in the fashionable parks. And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside the baker's they had smelled the goose and known it for their own; and basking in luxurious thoughts of sage and onion, these young Cratchits danced about the table, and exalted Master Peter Cratchit to the skies, while he (not proud, although his collar nearly choked him) blew the fire until the slow potatoes, bubbling up, knocked loudly at the saucepan-lid to be let out and peeled.

"What has ever got your precious father, then?" said Mrs. Cratchit. "And your brother, Tiny Tim! And Martha warn't as late last Christmas Day by half an hour!"

"Here's Martha, mother!" said a girl, appearing as she spoke.

"Here's Martha, mother!" cried the two young Cratchits. "Hurrah! There's such a goose, Martha!"



HE HAD BEEN TIM'S BLOOD HORSE ALL THE WAY FROM CHURCH, AND HAD COME HOME RAMPANT.

C.S.

"Why, bless your heart alive, my dear, how late you are!" said Mrs. Cratchit, kissing her a dozen times, and taking off her shawl and bonnet for her with officious zeal.

"We'd a deal of work to finish up last night," replied the girl, "and had to clear away this morning, mother!"

"Well! Never mind so long as you are come," said Mrs. Cratchit. "Sit ye down before the fire, my dear, and have a warm, Lord bless me!"

"No! no! There's father coming," cried the two young Cratchits, who were everywhere at once. "Hide, Martha, hide!"

So Martha hid herself, and in came little Bob, the father, with at least three feet of comforter, exclusive of the fringe, hanging down before him; and his threadbare clothes darned up and brushed, to look seasonable; and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame!

"Why, where's our Martha?" cried Bob Cratchit, looking round.

"Not coming," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"Not coming!" said Bob with a sudden declension in his high spirits; for he had been Tim's blood horse all the way from church, and had come home rampant. "Not coming upon Christmas Day!"

Martha didn't like to see him disappointed, if it were only in joke; so she came out prematurely from behind the closet door, and ran into his arms, while the two young Cratchits hustled Tiny Tim, and bore him off into the wash-house, that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper.

"And how did little Tim behave?" asked Mrs. Cratchit when she had rallied Bob on his credulity, and Bob had hugged his daughter to his heart's content.

"As good as gold," said Bob, "and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day who made lame beggars walk and blind men see."

Bob's voice was tremulous when he told them this, and trembled more when he said that Tiny Tim was growing strong and hearty.

His active little crutch was heard upon the floor, and back came Tiny Tim before another word was spoken, escorted by his brother and sister to his stool before the fire; and while Bob, turning up his cuffs—as if, poor fellow, they were capable of being made more shabby—compounded some hot mixture in a jug with gin and lemons, and stirred it round and round and put it on the hob to simmer, Master Peter and the two ubiquitous young Cratchits went to fetch the goose, with which they soon returned in high procession.

Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds; a feathered phenomenon, to which a black swan was a matter of course—and in truth it was something very like it in that house. Mrs. Cratchit made the gravy (ready beforehand in a little saucepan) hissing hot; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigor; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple-sauce; Martha dusted the hot plates; Bob took Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table; the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and mounting guard upon their posts, crammed spoons into their mouths, lest they should shriek for goose before their turn came to be helped. At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause as Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving-knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast; but when she did, and when the long-expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all round the board, and even Tiny Tim, excited by the two young Cratchits, beat on the table with the handle of his knife and feebly cried "Hurrah!"

There never was such a goose. Bob said he didn't believe there ever was such a goose cooked. Its tenderness and flavor, size and cheapness were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by apple-sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family; indeed, as Mrs. Cratchit said with great delight (surveying one small atom of a bone upon the dish), they hadn't ate it all at last! Yet every one had had enough, and the youngest Cratchits in particular were steeped in sage and onion to the eyebrows! But now, the plates being changed by Miss Belinda, Mrs. Cratchit left the room alone—(too nervous to bear witnesses)—to take the pudding up and bring it in.

Suppose it should not be done enough! Suppose it should break in turning out! Suppose somebody should have got over the wall of the back yard and stolen it while they were merry with the goose—a supposition at which the two young Cratchits became livid! All sorts of horrors were supposed.

Halloo! A great deal of steam! The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing-day! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating-house and a pastry-cook's next door to each other, with a laundress' next door to that! That was the pudding! In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered—flushed but smiling proudly—with the pudding, like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and firm, blazing in half of half a quartern of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

Oh, a wonderful pudding! Bob Cratchit said, and calmly too, that he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs. Cratchit since their marriage. Mrs. Cratchit said that now the weight was off her mind, she would confess she had had her doubts about the quantity of flour. Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been flat heresy to do so. Any Cratchit would have blushed to hint at such a thing.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The compound in the jug being tasted and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table and a shovelful of chestnuts on the fire. Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth, in what Bob Cratchit called a circle, meaning half a one; and at Bob Cratchit's elbow stood the family display of glass. Two tumblers and a custard-cup without a handle.

These held the hot stuff from the jug, however, as well as golden goblets would have done; and Bob served it out with beaming looks while the chestnuts on the fire sputtered and cracked noisily. Then Bob proposed:

"A merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!"

Which all the family reëchoed.

"God bless us every one!" said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

He sat very close to his father's side upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his as if he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him.

"Spirit," said Scrooge with an interest he had never felt before, "tell me if Tiny Tim will live."

"I see a vacant seat," replied the ghost, "in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the future the child will die."

"No, no," said Scrooge. "Oh, no, kind spirit! say he will be spared."

"If these shadows remain unaltered by the future, none other of my race," returned the ghost, "will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population."

Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the spirit, and was overcome with penitence and grief.

"Man," said the ghost, "if man you be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked cant until you have discovered what the surplus is and where is it. Will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be that in the sight of Heaven you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child. Oh, God! to hear the insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust."

Scrooge bent before the ghost's rebuke, and trembling cast his eyes upon the ground. But he raised them speedily on hearing his own name.

"Mr. Scrooge!" said Bob; "I'll give you Mr. Scrooge, the founder of the feast!"

"The founder of the feast indeed!" cried Mrs. Cratchit, reddening. "I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it."

"My dear," said Bob, "the children! Christmas Day."

"It should be Christmas Day, I am sure," said she, "on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge. You know he is, Robert! Nobody knows it better than you do, poor fellow!"

"My dear," was Bob's mild answer, "Christmas Day."

"I'll drink his health for your sake and the day's," said Mrs. Cratchit, "not for his. Long life to him! A merry Christmas and a happy New Year! He'll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!"

The children drank the toast after her. It was the first of their proceedings which had no heartiness. Tiny Tim drank it last of all, but he didn't care twopence for it. Scrooge was the ogre of the family. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party, which was not dispelled for full five minutes.

After it had passed away they were ten times merrier than before, from the mere relief of Scrooge the Baleful being done with. Bob Cratchit told them how he had a situation in his eye for Master Peter, which would bring in, if obtainted, full five-and-sixpence weekly. The two young Cratchits laughed tremendously at the idea of Peter's being a man of business; and Peter himself looked thoughtfully at the fire from between his collars as if he were deliberating what particular investments he should favor when he came into the receipt of that bewildering income. Martha, who was a poor apprentice at a milliner's, then told them what kind of work she had to do, and how many hours she worked at a stretch, and how she meant to lie abed to-morrow morning for a good long rest; to-morrow being a holiday she passed at home. Also how she had seen a countess and a lord some days before, and how the lord "was much about as tall as Peter;" at which Peter pulled up his collars so high that you couldn't have seen his head if you had been there. All this time the chestnuts and the jug went round and round; and by and by they had a song, about a lost child traveling in the snow, from Tiny Tim, who had a plaintive little voice, and sang it very well indeed.

There was nothing of high mark in this. They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being water-proof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's. But they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time; and when they faded, and looked happier yet in the bright sprinklings of the spirit's torch at parting, Scrooge had his eye upon them, and especially on Tiny Tim, until the last.

By this time it was getting dark and snowing pretty heavily; and as Scrooge and the spirit went along the streets, the brightness of the roaring fires in kitchens, parlors, and all sorts of rooms was wonderful. Here the flickerings of the blaze showed preparations for a cozy dinner, with hot plates baking through and through before the fire, and deep red curtains, ready to be drawn to shut out cold and darkness. There all the children of the house were running out into the snow to meet their married sisters, brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts, and be the first to greet them. Here, again, were shadows on the window-blind of guests assembling; and there a group of handsome girls, all hooded and fur-booted, and all chattering at once, tripped lightly off to some near neighbor's house; where, woe upon the single man who saw them enter—artul witches, well they knew it—in a glow!

But if you had judged from the numbers of people on their way to friendly gatherings, you might have thought that no one was at home to give them welcome when they got there, instead of every house expecting company, and piling up its fires half-chimney high. Blessings on it, how the ghost exulted! How it bared its breadth of breast, and opened its capacious palm, and floated on, outpouring, with a generous hand, its bright and harmless mirth on everything within its reach! The very lamplighter, who ran on before, dotting the dusky street with specks of light, and who was dressed to spend the evening somewhere, laughed out loudly as the spirit passed, though little kenned the lamplighter that he had any company but Christmas!

And now, without a word of warning from the ghost, they stood upon a bleak and desert moor, where monstrous masses of rude stone were cast about, as though it were the burial-place of giants; and water spread itself wheresoever it listed, or would have done so but for the frost that held it prisoner; and nothing grew but moss and furze and coarse rank grass. Down in the west the setting sun had left a streak of fiery red, which glared upon the desolation for an instant like a sullen eye, and frowning lower, lower, lower yet, was lost in the thick gloom of darkest night.

"What place is this?" asked Scrooge.

"A place where miners live, who labor in the bowels of the earth," returned the spirit. "But they know me. See!"

A light shone from the window of a hut, and swiftly they advanced toward it. Passing through the wall of mud and stone, they found a cheerful company assembled round a glowing fire. An old, old man and woman, with their children and their children's children, and another generation beyond that, all decked out gayly in their holiday attire. The old man, in a voice that seldom rose above the howling of the wind upon the barren waste, was singing them a Christmas song—it had been a very old song when he was a boy—and from time to time they all joined in the chorus. So surely as they raised their voices, the old man got quite blithe and loud; and so surely as they stopped his vigor sank again.

The spirit did not tarry here, but bade Scrooge hold his robe, and passing on above the moor, sped—whither? Not to sea? To sea. To Scrooge's horror, looking back, he saw the last of the land, a frightful range of rocks, behind them; and his ears were deafened by the thundering of water as it rolled and roared and raged among the dreadful caverns it had worn, and fiercely tried to undermine the earth.

Built upon a dismal reef of sunken rocks, some league or so from shore, on which the waters chafed and dashed the wild year through, there stood a solitary lighthouse. Great heaps of seaweed clung to its base, and storm-birds—born of the wind one might suppose, as seaweed of the water—rose and fell about it, like the waves they skimmed.

But even here, two men who watched the light had made a fire, that through the loophole in the thick stone wall shed out a ray of brightness on the awful sea. Joining their horny hands over the rough table at which they sat, they wished each other merry Christmas in their can of grog; and one of them—the elder, too, with his face all damaged and scarred with hard weather, as the figurehead of an old ship might be—struck up a sturdy song that was like a gale in itself.

Again the ghost sped on above the black and heaving sea—on, on—until, being far away, as he told Scrooge, from any shore, they lighted on a ship. They stood beside the helmsman at the wheel, the lookout in the bow, the officers who had the watch; dark, ghostly figures in their several stations; but every man among them hummed a Christmas tune, or had a Christmas thought, or spoke below his breath to his companion of some by-gone

Christmas Day, with homeward hopes belonging to it. And every man on board, waking or sleeping, good or bad, had had a kinder word for another on that day than on any day in the year; and had shared to some extent in its festivities; and had remembered those he cared for at a distance, and had known that they delighted to remember him.

It was a great surprise to Scrooge, while listening to the moaning of the wind, and thinking what a solemn thing it was to move on through the lonely darkness over an unknown abyss, whose depths were secrets as profound as death: it was a great surprise to Scrooge, while thus engaged, to hear a hearty laugh. It was a much greater surprise to Scrooge to recognize it as his own nephew's and to find himself in a bright, dry, gleaming room, with the spirit standing smiling by his side, and looking at that same nephew with approving affability!

"Ha! ha!" laughed Scrooge's nephew. "Ha! ha! ha!"

If you should happen, by any unlikely chance, to know a man more blessed in a laugh than Scrooge's nephew, all I can say is, I should like to know him too. Introduce him to me, and I'll cultivate his acquaintance.

It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that while there is infection in disease and sorrow there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humor. When Scrooge's nephew laughed in this way, holding his sides, rolling his head, and twisting his face into the most extravagant contortions, Scrooge's niece, by marriage, laughed as heartily as he. And their assembled friends being not a bit behindhand, roared out lustily.

"Ha! ha! Ha! ha! ha! ha!"

"He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live!" cried Scrooge's nephew. "He believed it too!"

"More shame for him, Fred!" said Scrooge's niece indignantly. Bless those women; they never do anything by halves. They are always in earnest.

She was very pretty: exceedingly pretty. With a dimpled, surprised-looking, capital face; a ripe little mouth that seemed made to be kissed—as no doubt it was; all kinds of good little dots about her chin that melted into one another when she laughed; and the sunniest pair of eyes you ever saw in any little creature's head. Altogether she was what you would have called provoking, you know; but satisfactory, too. Oh, perfectly satisfactory.

"He's a comical old fellow," said Scrooge's nephew, "that's the truth; and not so pleasant as he might be. However, his offenses carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him."

"I'm sure he is very rich, Fred," hinted Scrooge's niece. "At least you always tell me so."

"What of that, my dear?" said Scrooge's nephew. "His wealth is of no use to him. He don't do any good with it. He don't make himself comfortable with it. He hasn't the satisfaction of thinking—ha ha! ha!—that he is ever going to benefit us with it."

"I have no patience with him," observed Scrooge's niece. Scrooge's niece's sisters and all the other ladies expressed the same opinion.

"Oh, I have!" said Scrooge's nephew. "I am sorry for him; I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his ill whims? Himself, always. Here he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won't come and dine with us. What's the consequence? He don't lose much of a dinner."

"Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner," interrupted Scrooge's niece. Everybody else said the same, and they must be allowed to have been competent judges, because they had just had dinner; and with the dessert upon the table were clustered round the fire by lamplight.

"Well! I'm very glad to hear it," said Scrooge's nephew, "because I haven't great faith in these young housekeepers. What do you say, Topper?"

Topper had clearly got his eye upon one of Scrooge's niece's sisters, for he answered that a bachelor was a wretched outcast, who had no right to express an opinion on the subject. Whereat Scrooge's niece's sister—the plump one with the lace tucker: not the one with the roses—blushed.

"Do go on, Fred," said Scrooge's niece, clapping her hands. "He never finishes what he begins to say! He is such a ridiculous fellow!"

Scrooge's nephew reveled in another laugh, and as it was impossible to keep the infection off—though the plump sister tried hard to do it with aromatic vinegar—his example was unanimously followed.

"I was only going to say," said Scrooge's nephew, "that the consequence of his taking a dislike to us, and not making merry with us, is, as I think, that he loses some pleasant moments, which could do him no harm. I am sure he loses pleasanter companions than he can find in his own thoughts, either in his moldy old office or his dusty chambers. I mean to give him the same chance every year, whether he likes it or not, for I pity him. He may rail at Christmas till he dies, but he can't help thinking better of it—I defy him—if he finds me going there, in good temper, year after year, and saying Uncle Scrooge, how are you? If it only puts him in the vein to leave his poor clerk £50, that's something; and I think I shook him yesterday."

It was their turn to laugh now at the notion of his shaking Scrooge. But being thoroughly good-natured, and not much caring what they laughed at, so that they laughed at any rate, he encouraged them in their merriment and passed the bottle joyously.

After tea they had some music. For they were a musical family, and knew what they were about when they sang a glee or a catch, I can assure you: especially Topper, who could growl away in the bass like a good one, and never swell the large veins in his forehead, or get red in the face over it. Scrooge's niece played well upon the harp; and played among other tunes a simple little air (a mere nothing: you might learn to whistle it in two minutes) which had been familiar to the child who fetched Scrooge from the boarding-school, as he had been reminded by the ghost of Christmas past. When the strain of music sounded all the things that ghost had shown him came upon his mind; he softened more and more; and thought that if he could have listened to it often, years ago, he might have cultivated the kindness of life for his own happiness with his own hands, without resorting to the sexton's spade that buried Jacob Marley.

But they didn't devote the whole evening to music. After awhile they played at forfeits; for it is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself. Stop! There was first a game at blind-man's buff. Of course there was. And I no more believe that Topper was really blind than I believe he had eyes in his boots. My opinion is that it was a done thing between him and Scrooge's nephew; and that the ghost of Christmas present knew it. The way he went after that plump sister in the lace tucker was an outrage on the credulity of human nature. Knocking down the fire-irons, tumbling over the chairs, bumping against the piano, smothering himself among the curtains, wherever she went, there went he! He always knew where the plump sister was. He wouldn't catch anybody else. If you had fallen up against him (as some of them did on purpose), he would have made a feint of endeavoring to seize you, which would have been an affront to your understanding, and would instantly have sidled off in the direction of the plump sister. She often cried out that it wasn't fair; and it really was not. But when at last he caught her; when, in spite of all her silken rustlings, and her rapid flutterings past him, he got her into a corner whence there was no escape; then his conduct was the most execrable. For his pretending not to know her; his pretending that it was necessary to touch her head-dress, and further to assure himself of her identity by pressing a certain ring upon her finger, and a certain chain about her neck, was vile, monstrous! No doubt she told him her opinion of it when, another blind man being in office, they were so very confidential together behind the curtains.

Scrooge's niece was not one of the blind-man's buff party, but was made comfortable with a large chair and a footstool, in a snug corner, where the ghost and Scrooge were close behind her. But she joined in the forfeits, and loved her love to admiration with all the letters of the alphabet. Likewise at the game of How, When, and Where she was very great, and to the secret joy of Scrooge's nephew, beat her sisters hollow; though they were sharp girls too, as Topper could have told you. There might have been twenty people there, young and old, but they all played, and so did Scrooge; for wholly forgetting, in the interest he had in what was going on, that his voice made no sound in their ears, he sometimes came out with his guess quite loud, and very often guessed quite right, too; for the sharpest needle, best Whitechapel, warranted not to cut in the eye, was not sharper than Scrooge; blunt as he took it in his head to be.

The ghost was greatly pleased to find him in this mood, and looked upon him with such favor that he begged like a boy to be allowed to stay until the guests departed. But this the spirit said could not be done.

"Here is a new game," said Scrooge. "One half-hour, spirit, only one!"

It was a game called Yes and No, where Scrooge's nephew had to think of something, and the rest must find out what; he only answering to their questions yes or no, as the case was. The brisk fire of questioning to which he was exposed elicited from him that he was thinking of an animal, a live animal, rather a disagreeable animal, a savage animal, an animal that growled and grunted sometimes, and talked sometimes, and lived in London, and walked about the streets, and wasn't made a show of, and wasn't led by anybody, and didn't live in a menagerie, and was never killed in a market, and was not a horse, or an ass, or a cow, or a bull, or a tiger, or a dog, or a pig, or a cat, or a bear. At every fresh question that was put to him, this nephew burst into a fresh roar of laughter; and was so inexpressibly tickled that he was obliged to get up off the sofa and stamp. At last the plump sister, falling into a similar state, cried out:

"I have found it out! I know what it is, Fred! I know what it is!"

"What is it?" cried Fred.

"It's your Uncle Scro-o-o-o-oge!"

Which it certainly was. Admiration was the universal sentiment, though some objected that the reply to "Is it a bear?" ought to have been "Yes;" inasmuch as an answer in the negative was sufficient to have diverted their thoughts from Mr. Scrooge, supposing they had ever had any tendency that way.

"He has given us plenty of merriment, I am sure," said Fred, "and it would be ungrateful not to drink his health. Here is a glass of mulled wine ready to our hand at the moment; and I say, 'Uncle Scrooge!' "

"Well! Uncle Scrooge!" they cried.

"A merry Christmas and a happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is!" said Scrooge's nephew. "He wouldn't take it from me, but may he have it, nevertheless. Uncle Scrooge!"

Uncle Scrooge had imperceptibly become so gay and light of heart that he would have pledged the unconscious company in return and thanked them in an inaudible speech if the ghost had given him time. But the whole scene passed off in the breath of the last word spoken by his nephew; and he and the spirit were again upon their travels.

Much they saw, and far they went, and many homes they visited, but always with a happy end. The spirit stood beside sick-beds, and they were cheerful; on foreign lands, and they were close at home; by struggling men, and they were patient in their greater hope; by poverty, and it was rich. In almshouse, hospital, and jail, in misery's every refuge, where vain man in his little brief authority had not made fast the door and barred the spirit out, he left his blessing, and taught Scrooge his precepts.

It was a long night, if it were only a night; but Scrooge had his doubts of this, because the Christmas holidays appeared to be condensed into the space of time they passed together. It was strange, too, that while Scrooge remained unaltered in his outward form the ghost grew older, clearly older. Scrooge had observed this change, but never spoke of it, until they left a children's Twelfth Night party, when, looking at the spirit as they stood together in an open place, he noticed that its hair was gray.

"Are spirits' lives so short?" asked Scrooge.

"My life upon this globe is very brief," replied the ghost. "It ends to-night."

"To-night!" cried Scrooge.

"To-night at midnight. Hark! The time is drawing near."

The chimes were ringing the three-quarters past eleven at that moment.

"Forgive me if I am not justified in what I ask," said Scrooge, looking intently at the spirit's robe, "but I see something strange, and not belonging to yourself, protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw?"

"It might be a claw, for the flesh there is upon it," was the spirit's sorrowful reply. "Look here."

From the foldings of its robe it brought two children; wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable. They knelt down at its feet and clung upon the outside of its garment.

"Oh, man! look here. Look, look, down here!" exclaimed the ghost.

They were a boy and girl. Yellow, meager, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shriveled hand, like that of age, had pinched and twisted them and pulled them into shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked and glared out menacing. No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity, in any grade, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread.

Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude.

"Spirit! are they yours?" Scrooge could say no more.

"They are man's," said the spirit, looking down upon them. "And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it!" cried the spirit, stretching out its hand toward the city. "Slander those who tell it ye! Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse. And abide the end!'"

"Have they no refuge or resource?" cried Scrooge.

"Are there no prisons?" said the spirit, turning on him for the last time with his own words. "Are there no workhouses?"

The bell struck twelve.

Scrooge looked about him for the ghost, and saw it not. As the last stroke ceased to vibrate he remembered the prediction of old Jacob Marley, and lifting up his eyes beheld a solemn phantom draped and hooded coming like a mist along the ground toward him.

STAVE FOUR.

THE LAST OF THE SPIRITS.

THE phantom slowly, gravely, silently approached. When it came near him Scrooge bent down upon his knee, for in the very air through which this spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery.

It was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand. But for this it would have been difficult to detach its figure from the night and separate it from the darkness by which it was surrounded.

He felt that it was tall and stately when it came beside him, and that its mysterious presence filled him with a solemn dread. He knew no more, for the spirit neither spoke nor moved.

"I am in the presence of the ghost of Christmas yet to come?" said Scrooge.

The spirit answered not, but pointed onward with its hand.

"You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us," Scrooge pursued. "Is that so, spirit?"

The upper portion of the garment was contracted for an instant in its folds, as if the spirit had inclined its head. That was the only answer he received.

Although well used to ghostly company by this time, Scrooge feared the silent shape so much that his legs trembled beneath him, and he found that he could hardly stand when he prepared to follow it. The spirit paused a moment, as observing his condition and giving him time to recover.

But Scrooge was all the worse for this. It thrilled him with a vague uncertain horror to know that behind the dusky shroud there were ghostly eyes intently fixed upon him, while he, though he stretched his own to the utmost, could see nothing but a spectral hand and one great heap of black.

"Ghost of the future!" he exclaimed, "I fear you more than any specter I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?"

It gave him no reply. The hand was pointed straight before them.

"Lead on!" said Scrooge. "Lead on! The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know. Lead on, spirit!"

The phantom moved away as it had come toward him. Scrooge followed in the shadow of its dress, which bore him up, he thought, and carried him along.

They scarcely seemed to enter the city; for the city rather seemed to spring up about them and encompass them of its own act. But there they were, in the heart of it; on 'Change, among the merchants; who hurried up and down, and chinked the money in their pockets, and conversed in groups, and looked at their watches, and trifled thoughtfully with their great gold seals and so forth, as Scrooge had seen them often.

The spirit stopped beside one little knot of business men. Observing that the hand was pointed to them, Scrooge advanced to listen to their talk.

"No," said a great fat man with a monstrous chin, "I don't know much about it, either way. I only know he's dead."

"When did he die?" inquired another.

"Last night, I believe."

"Why, what was the matter with him?" asked a third, taking a vast quantity of snuff out of a very large snuffbox. "I thought he'd never die."

"God knows," said the first, with a yawn.

"What has he done with his money?" asked a red-faced gentleman with a pendulous excrescence on the end of his nose, that shook like the gills of a turkey-cock.

"I haven't heard," said the man the large chin, yawning again. "Left it to his company, perhaps. He hasn't left it to *me*. That's all I know."

This pleasantry was received with a general laugh.

"It's likely to be a very cheap funeral," said the same speaker; "for upon my life I don't know of anybody to go to it. Suppose we make up a party and volunteer?"

"I don't mind going if a lunch is provided," observed the gentleman with the excrescence on his nose. "But I must be fed if I make one."

Another laugh.

"Well, I am the most disinterested among you, after all," said the first speaker, "for I never wear black gloves, and I never eat lunch. But I'll offer to go, if anybody else will. When I come to think of it, I'm not at all sure that I wasn't his most particular friend; for we used to stop and speak whenever we met. By-by!"

Speakers and listeners strolled way and mixed with other groups. Scrooge knew the men, and looked toward the spirit for an explanation.

The phantom glided on into a street. Its finger pointed to two persons meeting. Scrooge listened again, thinking that the explanation might lie here.

He knew these men, also, perfectly. They were men of business: very wealthy and of great importance. He had made a point always of standing well in their esteem: in a business point of view, that is; strictly in a business point of view.

"How are you?" said one.

"How are you?" returned the other.

"Well!" said the first. "Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?"

"So I am told," returned the second. "Cold, isn't it?"

"Seasonable for Christmas time. You're not a skater, I suppose?"

"No. No. Something else to think of. Good-morning!"

Not another word. That was their meeting, their conversation, and their parting.

Scrooge was at first inclined to be surprised that the spirit should attach importance to conversations apparently so trivial; but feeling assured that they must have some hidden purpose, he set himself to consider what it was likely to be. They could scarcely be supposed to have any bearing on the death of Jacob, his old partner, for that was past, and this ghost's province was the future. Nor could he think of any one immediately connected with himself to whom he could apply them. But nothing doubting that to whomsoever they applied they had some latent moral for his own improvement, he resolved to treasure up every word he heard and everything he saw; and especially to observe the shadow of himself when it appeared. For he had an expectation that the conduct of his future self would give him the clew he missed, and would render the solution of these riddles easy.

He looked about in that very place for his own image; but another man stood in his accustomed corner, and though the clock pointed to his usual time of day for being there, he saw no likeness of himself among the multitudes that poured in through the porch. It gave him little surprise, however; for he had been revolving in his mind a change of life, and thought and hoped he saw his new-born resolutions carried out in this.

Quiet and dark beside him stood the phantom, with its outstretched hand. When he roused himself from his thoughtful quest, he fancied from the turn of the hand and its situation in reference to himself that the unseen eyes were looking at him keenly. It made him shudder and feel very cold.

They left the busy scene and went into an obscure part of the town, where Scrooge had never penetrated before, although he recognized its situation and its bad repute. The ways were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; the people half-naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly. Alleys and archways, like so many cesspools, disgorged their offenses of smell, and dirt, and life upon the straggling streets; and the whole quarter reeked with crime, with filth and misery.

Far in this den of infamous resort there was a low-browed, beetling shop, below a pent-house roof, where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy offal were bought. Upon the floor within were piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, weights, and refuse iron of all kinds. Secrets that few would like to scrutinize were bred and hidden in mountains of unseemly rags, masses of corrupted fat, and sepulchers of bones. Sitting in among the wares he dealt in, by a charcoal stove made of old bricks, was a gray-haired rascal, nearly seventy years of age; who had screened himself from the cold air without by a frowsy curtaining of miscellaneous tatters hung upon a line, and smoked his pipe in all the luxury of calm retirement.

Scrooge and the phantom came into the presence of this man just as a woman with a heavy bundle slunk into the shop. But she had scarcely entered when another woman, similarly laden, came in too; and she was closely followed by a man in faded black, who was no less startled by the sight of them than they had been upon the recognition of each other. After a short period of blank astonishment, in which the old man with the pipe had joined them, they all three burst into a laugh.

"Let the charwoman alone to be the first!" cried she who had entered first. "Let the laundress alone to be the second; and let the undertaker's man alone to be the third. Look here, old Joe, here's a chance! If we haven't all three met here without meaning it!"

"You couldn't have met in a better place," said old Joe, removing his pipe from his mouth. "Come into the parlor. You were made free of it long ago, you know; and the other two ain't strangers. Stop till I shut the door of the shop. Ah! How it skreeks! There ain't such a rusty bit of metal in the place as its own hinges, I believe; and I'm sure there's no such old bones here as mine. Ha! ha! We're all suitable to our calling, we're well matched. Come into the parlor. Come into the parlor."

The parlor was the space behind the screen of rags. The old man raked the fire together with an old stair-rod, and having trimmed his smoky lamp (for it was night) with the stem of his pipe, put it in his mouth again.

While he did this the woman who had already spoken threw her bundle on the floor and sat down in a flaunting manner on a stool; crossing her elbows on her knees and looking with a bold defiance at the other two.

"What odds then! What odds, Mrs. Dilber?" said the woman. "Every person has a right to take care of themselves. He always did."

"That's true, indeed!" said the laundress. "No man more so."

"Why, then, don't stand staring as if you was afraid, woman; who's the wiser? We're not going to pick holes in each other's coats, I suppose?"

"No, indeed!" said Mrs. Dilber and the man together. "We should hope not."

"Very well, then!" cried the woman. "That's enough. Who's the worse for the loss of a few things like these? Not a dead man, I suppose."

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Dilber, laughing.

"If he wanted to keep 'em after he was dead, a wicked old screw," pursued the woman," why wasn't he natural in his lifetime? If he had been he'd have had somebody to look after him when he was struck with death, instead of lying gasping out his last there alone by himself."

"It's the truest word that ever was spoke," said Mrs. Dilber. "It's a judgment on him."

"I wish it was a little heavier judgment," replied the woman: "and it should have been, you depend upon it, if I could have laid my hands on anything else. Open that bundle, old Joe, and let me know the value of it. Speak out plain. I'm not afraid to be the first nor afraid for them to see it. We knew pretty well that we were helping ourselves before we met here, I believe. It's no sin. Open the bundle, Joe."

But the gallantry of her friends would not allow of this; and the man in faded black, mounting the breach first, produced his plunder. It was not extensive. A seal or two, a pencil-case, a pair of sleeve-buttons, and a brooch of no great value, were all. They were severally examined and appraised by old Joe, who chalked the sums he was disposed to give for each upon the wall, and added them up into a total when he found there was nothing more to come.

"That's your account," said Joe, "and I wouldn't give another sixpence if I was to be boiled for not doing it. Who's next?"

Mrs. Dilber was next. Sheets and towels, a little wearing apparel, two old-fashioned silver teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a few boots. Her account was stated on the wall in the same manner.

"I always give too much to ladies. It's a weakness of mine, and that's the way I ruin myself," said old Joe. "That's your account. If you asked me for another penny and made it an open question, I'd repent of being so liberal, and knock off half a crown."

"And now undo my bundle, Joe," said the first woman.

Joe went down on his knees for the greater convenience of opening it, and having unfastened a great many knots, dragged out a large and heavy roll of some dark stuff.

"What do you call this?" said Joe. "Bed-curtains!"

"Ah!" returned the woman, laughing and leaning forward on her crossed arms. "Bed-curtains!"

"You don't mean to say you took 'em down, rings and all, with him lying there?" said Joe.

"Yes, I do," replied the woman. "Why not?"

"You were born to make your fortune," said Joe, "and you'll certainly do it."

"I certainly shan't hold my hand, when I can get anything in it by reaching it out, for the sake of such a man as he was, I promise you, Joe," returned the woman coolly. "Don't drop that oil upon the blankets now."

"His blankets?" asked Joe.

"Whose else's do you think?" replied the woman. "He isn't likely to take cold without 'em, I dare say."

"I hope he didn't die of anything catching? Eh?" said old Joe, stopping in his work and looking up.

"Don't you be afraid of that," returned the woman. "I ain't so fond of his company that I'd loiter about him for such things if he did. Ah! you may look through that shirt till your eyes ache; but you won't find a hole in it, nor a threadbare place. It's the best he had, and a fine one too. They'd have wasted it if it hadn't been for me."

"What do you call wasting of it?" asked old Joe.

"Putting it on him to be buried in, to be sure," replied the woman with a laugh. "Somebody was fool enough to do it, but I took it off again. If calico ain't good enough for such a purpose, it isn't good enough for anything. It's quite as unbecoming to the body. He can't look uglier than he did in that one."

Scrooge listened to this dialogue in horror. As they sat grouped about their spoil, in the scanty light afforded by the old man's lamp, he viewed them with a detestation and disgust which could hardly have been greater though they had been obscene demons marketing the corpse itself.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the same woman when old Joe, producing a flannel bag with money in it, told out their several gains upon the ground. "This is the end of it, you see! He frightened every one away from him when he was alive, to profit us when he was dead! Ha! ha! ha!"

"Spirit!" said Scrooge, shuddering from head to foot, "I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way now. Merciful Heaven, what is this!"

He recoiled in terror, for the scene had changed, and now he almost touched a bed: a bare, uncurtained bed: on which, beneath a ragged sheet, there lay a something covered up, which, though it was dumb, announced itself in awful language.

The room was very dark, too dark to be observed with any accuracy, though Scrooge glanced round it, in obedience to a secret impulse, anxious to know what kind of room it was. A pale light rising in the outer air fell straight upon the bed; and on it, plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man.

Scrooge glanced toward the phantom. Its steady hand was pointed to the head. The cover was so carelessly adjusted that the slightest raising of it, the motion of a finger upon Scrooge's part, would have disclosed the face. He thought of it, felt how easy it would be to do, and longed to do it; but had no more power to withdraw the veil than to dismiss the specter at his side.

Oh, cold, cold, rigid, dreadful Death, set up thine altar here, and dress it with such terrors as thou hast at thy command: for this is thy dominion! But of the loved, revered, and honored head thou canst not turn one hair to thy dread purposes or make one feature odious. It is not that the hand is heavy and will fall down when released; it is not that the heart and pulse are still; but that the hand was open, generous, and true; the heart brave, warm, and tender; and the pulse a man's. Strike, shadow, strike! And see his good deeds springing from the wound, to sow the world with life immortal!

No voice pronounced these words in Scrooge's ears, and yet he heard them when he looked upon the bed. He thought if this man could be raised up now, what would be his foremost thoughts? Avarice, hard-dealing, griping cares? They have brought him to a rich end, truly!

He lay in the dark, empty house, with not a man, a woman, or a child to say that he was kind to me in this or that, and for the memory of one kind word I will be kind to him. A cat was tearing at the door, and there was a sound of gnawing rats beneath the hearth-stone. What they wanted in the room of death, and why they were so restless and disturbed, Scrooge did not dare to think.

"Spirit!" he said, "this is a fearful place. In leaving t, I shall not leave its lesson, trust me. Let us go!"

Still the ghost pointed with an unmoved finger to the head.

"I understand you," Scrooge returned, "and I would do it if I could. But I have not the power, spirit. I have not the power."

Again it seemed to look upon him.

"If there is any person in the town who feels emotion caused by this man's death," said Scrooge quite agonized, "show that person to me, spirit, I beseech you!"

The phantom spread its dark robe before him for a moment, like a wing; and withdrawing it, revealed a room by daylight, where a mother and her children were.

She was expecting some one, and with anxious eagerness; for she walked up and down the room; started at every sound; looked out from the window; glanced at the clock; tried, but in vain, to work with her needle; and could hardly bear the voices of the children in their play.

At length the long-expected knock was heard. She hurried to the door and met her husband; a man whose face was careworn and depressed, though he was young. There was a remarkable expression in it now; a kind of serious delight of which he felt ashamed and which he struggled to repress.

He sat down to the dinner that had been hoarding for him by the fire; and when she asked him faintly what news (which was not until after a long silence), he appeared embarrassed how to answer.

"Is it good," she said, "or bad?"—to help him.

"Bad," he answered.

"We are quite ruined?"

"No. There is hope yet, Caroline."

"If he relents," she said, amazed, "there is! Nothing is past hope if such a miracle has happened."

"He is past relenting," said her husband. "He is dead."

She was a mild and patient creature if her face spoke truth; but she was thankful in her soul to hear it, and she said so, with clasped hands. She prayed forgiveness the next moment, and was sorry; but the first was the emotion of her heart.

"What the half-drunken woman whom I told you of last night said to me when I tried to see him and obtain a week's delay, and what I thought was a mere excuse to avoid me, turns out to have been quite true. He was not only very ill, but dying then."

"To whom will our debt be transferred?"

"I don't know. But before that time we shall be ready with the money; and even though we were not, it would be a bad fortune indeed to find so merciless a creditor in his successor. We may sleep to-night with light hearts, Caroline!"

Yes. Soften it as they would, their hearts were lighter. The children's faces, hushed and clustered round to hear what they so little understood, were brighter; and it was a happier house for this man's death! The only emotion that the ghost could show him, caused by the event, was one of pleasure.

"Let me see some tenderness connected with a death," said Scrooge, "or that dark chamber, spirit, which we left just now, will be forever present to me."

The ghost conducted him through several streets familiar to his feet; and as they went along, Scrooge looked here and there to find himself, but nowhere was he to be seen. They entered poor Bob Cratchit's house, the dwelling he had visited before, and found the mother and the children seated round the fire.

Quiet. Very quiet. The noisy little Cratchits were as still as statues in one corner, and sat looking up at Peter, who had a book before him. The mother and her daughters were engaged in sewing. But surely they were very quiet!

" 'And He took a child, and set him in the midst of them.' "

Where had Scrooge heard those words? He had not dreamed them. The boy must have read them out as he and the spirit crossed the threshold. Why did he not go on?

The mother laid her work upon the table and put her hand up to her face.

"The color hurts my eyes," she said.

The color? Ah, poor Tiny Tim!

"They're better now again," said Cratchit's wife. "It makes them weak by candlelight; and I wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home for the world. It must be near his time."

"Past it rather," Peter answered, shutting up his book. "But I think he has walked a little slower than he used, these few last evenings, mother."

They were very quiet again. At last she said, and in a steady, cheerful voice, that only faltered once:

"I have known him walk with—I have known him walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder, very fast indeed."

"And so have I," cried Peter. "Often."

"And so have I," exclaimed another. So had all.

"But he was very light to carry," she resumed, intent upon her work, "and his father loved him so that it was no trouble: no trouble. And there is your father at the door!"

She hurried out to meet him; and little Bob in his comforter—he had need of it, poor fellow—came in. His tea was ready for him on the hob, and they all tried who should help him to it most. Then the two young Cratchits got upon his knees and laid each child a little cheek against his face, as if they said, "Don't mind it, father. Don't be grieved!"

Bob was very cheerful with them, and spoke pleasantly to all the family. He looked at the work upon the table, and praised the industry and speed of Mrs. Cratchit and the girls. They would be done long before Sunday, he said.

"Sunday! You went to-day, then, Robert?" said his wife.

"Yes, my dear," returned Bob. "I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is. But you'll see it often. I promised him that I would walk there on a Sunday. My little, little child!" cried Bob. "My little child'!'

He broke down all at once. He couldn't help it. If he could have helped it he and his child would have been further apart perhaps than they were.

He left the room, and went upstairs into the room above, which was lighted cheerfully and hung with Christmas. There was a chair set loose beside the child, and there were signs of some one having been there lately. Poor Bob sat down in it, and when he had thought a little and composed himself, he kissed the litle face. He was reconciled to what had happened, and went down again quite happy.

They drew about the fire and talked; the girls and mother working still. Bob told them of the extraordinary kindness of Mr. Scrooge's nephew, whom he had scarcely seen but once, and who, meeting him in the street that day, and seeing that he looked a little—"just a little down, you know," said Bob, inquired what had happened to distress him. "On which," said Bob, "for he is the pleasantest-spoken gentleman you ever heard, I told him. 'I am heartily sorry for it, Mr. Cratchit,' he said, 'and heartily sorry for your good wife.' By the bye, how he ever knew that, I don't know."

"Knew what, my dear?"

"Why, that you were a good wife," replied Bob.

"Everybody knows that!" said Peter.

"Very well observed, my boy!" cried Bob. "I hope they do. 'Heartily sorry,' he said, 'for your good wife. If I can be of service to you in any way,' he said, giving me his card, 'that's where I live. Pray come to me.' Now it wasn't," cried Bob, "for the sake of anything he might be able to do for us, so much as for his kind way, that this was quite delightful. It seemed as if he had known our Tiny Tim, and felt with us."

"I'm sure he's a good soul!" said Mrs. Cratchit.

"You would be surer of it, my dear," returned Bob, "if you saw and spoke to him. I shouldn't be at all surprised—mark what I say!—if he got Peter a better situation."

"Only hear that, Peter," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"And then," cried one of the girls, "Peter will be keeping company with some one, and setting up for himself."

"Get along with you!" retorted Peter, grinning.

"It's just as likely as not," said Bob, "one of these days; though there's plenty of time for that, my dear. But however and whenever we part from one another, I am sure we shall none of us forget poor Tiny Tim—shall we—or this first parting that there was among us?"

"Never, father!" cried they all.

"And I know," said Bob, "I know, my dears, that when we recollect how patient and how mild he was, although he was a little, little child, we shall not quarrel easily among ourselves, and forget poor Tiny Tim in doing it."

"No, never, father!" they all cried again.

"I am very happy," said little Bob, "I am very happy!"

Mrs. Cratchit kissed him, his daughters kis sedhim, the two young Cratchits kissed him, and Peter and himself shook hands. Spirit of Tiny Tim, thy childish essence was from God!

"Specter," said Scrooge, "something informs me that our parting moment is at hand. I know it, but I know not how. Tell me what man that was whom we saw lying dead."

The ghost of Christmas yet to come conveyed him, as before—though at a different time, he thought: indeed, there seemed no order in these latter visions, save that they were in the future—into the resorts of business men, but showed him not himself. Indeed, the spirit did not stay for anything, but went straight on, as to the end just now desired, until besought by Scrooge to tarry for a moment.

"This court," said Scrooge, "through which we hurry now, is where my place of occupation is and has been for a length of time. I see the house. Let me behold what I shall be in days to come!"

The spirit stopped; the hand was pointed elsewhere.

"The house is yonder," Scrooge exclaimed. "Why do you point away?"

The inexorable finger underwent no change.

Scrooge hastened to the window of his office and looked in. It was an office still, but not his. The furniture was not the same, and the figure in the chair was not himself. The phantom pointed as before.

He joined it once again, and wondering why and whither he had gone, accompanied it until they reached an iron gate. He paused to look round before entering.

A churchyard. Here, then, the wretched man whose name he had now to learn lay underneath the ground. It was a worthy place. Walled in by houses; overrun by grass and weeds, the growth of vegetation's death, not life; choked up with too much burying; fat with replete appetite. A worthy place!

The spirit stood among the graves and pointed down to one. He advanced toward it trembling. The phantom was exactly as it had been, but he dreaded that he saw new meaning in its solemn shape.

"Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point," said Scrooge, "answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that will be, or are they shadows of things that may be only?"

Still the ghost pointed downward to the grave by which it stood.

"Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead," said Scrooge. "But if the course be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!"

The spirit was immovable as ever.

Scrooge crept toward it, trembling as he went; and following the finger, read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, EBENEZER SCROOGE.

"Am *I* that man who lay upon the bed?" he cried, upon his knees.

The finger pointed from the grave to him and back again.

"No, spirit! Oh, no, no!"

The finger still was there.

"Spirit!" he cried, tight clutching at its robe, "hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this if I am past all hope?"

For the first time the hand appeared to shake.

"Good spirit," he pursued as down upon the ground he fell before it "your nature intercedes for me and pities me. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me by an altered life!"

The kind hand trembled.

"I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the past, the present, and the future. The spirits of all three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!"

In his agony he caught the spectral hand. It sought to free itself, but he was strong in his entreaty and detained it. The spirit, stronger yet, repulsed him.

Holding up his hands in a last prayer to have his fate reversed, he saw an alteration in the phantom's hood and dress. It shrank, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost.

STAVE FIVE.

THE END OF IT.

YES! and the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the time before him was his own, to make amends in!

"I will live in the past, the present, and the future!" Scrooge repeated as he scrambled out of bed. "The spirits of all three shall strive within me. O Jacob Marley! Heaven, and the Christmas time be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob, on my knees!"

He was so fluttered and so glowing with his good intentions that his broken voice would scarcely answer to his call. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the spirit, and his face was wet with tears.

"They are not torn down," cried Scrooge, folding one of his bed-curtains in his arms, "they are not torn down, rings and all. They are here—I am here—the shadows of the things that would have been may be dispelled. They will be. I know they will!"

His hands were busy with his garments all this time; turning them inside out, putting them on upside down, tearing them, mislaying them, making them parties to every kind of extravagance.

"I don't know what to do!" cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath; and making a perfect Laocoön of himself with his stockings. "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world. Halloo here! Whoop! Halloo!"

He had frisked into the sitting-room, and was now standing there: perfectly winded.

"There's the saucepan that the gruel was in!" cried Scrooge, starting off again, and going round the fireplace. "There's the door by which the ghost of Jacob Marley entered! There's the corner where the ghost of Christmas present sat! There's the window where I saw the wandering spirits! It's all right, it's all true, it all happened. Ha! ha! ha!"

Really, for a man who had been out of practice for so many years, it was a splendid laugh, a most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs!

"I don't know what day of the month it is!" said Scrooge. "I don't know how long I've been among the spirits. I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby. Halloo! Whoop! Halloo here!"

He was checked in his transports by the churches ringing out the lustiest peals he had ever heard. Clash, clang, hammer; ding, dong, bell. Bell, dong, ding; hammer, clang, clash! Oh, glorious! glorious!

Running to the window, he opened it and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring, cold; cold, piping for the blood to dance to: golden sunlight; heavenly sky; sweet fresh air; merry bells. Oh, glorious! Glorious!

"What's to-day!" cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhaps had loitered in to look about him.

"Eh?" returned the boy with all his might of wonder.

"What's to-day, my fine fellow?" said Scrooge.

"To-day!" replied the boy. "Why, Christmas Day."

"It's Christmas Day!" said Scrooge to himself. "I haven't missed it. The spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can. Halloo, my fine fellow!"

"Halloo!" returned the boy.

"Do you know the poulterer's, in the next street but one at the corner?" Scrooge inquired.

"I should hope I did," replied the lad.

"An intelligent boy!" said Scrooge. "A remarkable boy! Do you know whether they've sold the prize turkey that was hanging up there? Not the little prize turkey—the big one?"

"What, the one as big as me?" returned the boy.

"What a delightful boy!" said Scrooge. "It's a pleasure to talk to him. Yes, my buck!"

"It's hanging there now," replied the boy.

"Is it?" said Scrooge. "Go and buy it."

"Walk-ER!" exclaimed the boy.

"No, no," said Scrooge, "I am in earnest. Go and buy it, and tell 'em to bring it here, that I may give them the direction where to take it. Come back with the man, and I ll give you a shilling. Come back with him in less than five minutes and I'll give you half a crown!"

The boy was off like a shot. He must have had a steady hand at a trigger who could have got a shot off half so fast.

"I'll send it to Bob Cratchit's!" whispered Scrooge, rubbing his hands and splitting with a laugh. "He shan't know who sends it. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim. Joe Miller never made such a joke as sending it to Bob's will be!"

The hand in which he wrote the address was not a steady one, but write it he did, somehow, and went downstairs to open the street door, ready for the coming of the poulterer's man. As he stood there, waiting his arrival, the knocker caught his eye.

"I shall love it as long as I live!" cried Scrooge, patting it with his hand. "I scarcely ever looked at it before. What an honest expression it has in its face! It's a wonderful knocker! Here's the turkey. Halloo! Whoop! How are you! Merry Christmas!"

It was a turkey! He never could have stood upon his legs, that bird. He would have snapped 'em short off in a minute, like sticks of sealing-wax.

"Why, it's impossible to carry that to Camden Town," said Scrooge. "You must have a cab."

The chuckle with which he said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid for the cab, and the chuckle with which he recompensed the boy, were only to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again and chuckled till he cried.

Shaving was not an easy task, for his hand continued to shake very much; and shaving requires attention, even when you don't dance while you are at it. But if he had cut the end of his nose off, he would have put a piece of sticking-plaster over it and been quite satisfied.

He dressed himself "all in his best," and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, as he had seen them with the ghost of Christmas present; and walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge regarded every one with a delghted smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, that three or four good-humored fellows said, "Good-morning, sir! A merry Christmas to you!" And Scrooge said often afterward that of all the blithe sounds he had ever heard those were the blithest in his ears.

He had not gone far, when coming on toward him he beheld the portly gentleman who had walked into his counting-house the day before and said, "Scrooge & Marley's, I believe?" It sent a pang across his heart to think how this old gentleman would look upon him when they met; but he knew what path lay straight before him, and he took it.

"My dear sir," said Scrooge, quickening his pace and taking the old gentleman by both his hands. "How do you do? I hope you succeeded yesterday. It was very kind of you. A merry Christmas to you, sir!"

"Mr. Scrooge?"

"Yes," said Scrooge. "That is my name, and I fear it may not be pleasant to you. Allow me to ask your pardon. And will you have the goodness"—here Scrooge whispered in his ear.

"Lord bless me!" cried the gentleman as if his breath was taken away. "My dear Mr. Scrooge, are you serious?"

"If you please," said Scrooge. "Not a farthing less. A great many back payments are included in it, I assure you. Will you do me that favor?"

"My dear sir," said the other, shaking hands with him, "I don't know what to say to such munifi——"

"Don't say anything, please," retorted Scrooge. "Come and see me. Will you come and see me?"

"I will!" cried the old gentleman. And it was clear that he meant to do it.

"Thank'ee," said Scrooge. "I am much obliged to you. I thank you fifty times. Bless you!"

He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows, and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk—that anything—could give him so much happiness. In the afternoon he turned his steps toward his nephew's house.

He passed the door a dozen times before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash and did it:

"Is your master at home, my dear?" said Scrooge to the girl. Nice girl! Very.

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he, my love?" said Scrooge.

"He's in the dining-room, sir, along with mistress. I'll show you upstairs, if you please."

"Thank'ee. He knows me," said Scrooge, with his hand already on the dining-room lock. "I'll go in here, my dear."

He turned it gently and sidled his face in round the door. They were looking at the table (which was spread out in great array); for these young housekeepers are always nervous on such points, and like to see that everything is right.

"Fred!" said Scrooge.

Dear heart alive, how his niece by marriage started! Scrooge had forgotten, for the moment, about her sitting in the corner with the footstool, or he wouldn't have done it, on any account.

"Why, bless my soul!" cried Fred, "who's that?"

"It's I. Your Uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?"

Let him in! It is a mercy he didn't shake his arm off. He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier. His niece looked just the same. So did Topper when he came. So did the plump sister when she came. So did every one when they came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, wonderful happiness!

But he was early at the office next morning. Oh, he was early there. If he could only be there first and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart upon.

And he did it; yes, he did! The clock struck nine. No Bob. A quarter past. No Bob. He was full eighteen minutes and a half behind his time. Scrooge sat with his door wide open, that he might see him come into the tank.

His hat was off before he opened the door; his comforter too. He was on his stool in a jiffy; driving away with his pen as if he were trying to overtake nine o'clock.

"Halloo!" growled Scrooge in his accustomed voice, as near as he could feign it. "What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?"

"I am very sorry," said Bob. "I am behind my time."

"You are?" repeated Scrooge. "Yes. I think you are. Step this way, sir, if you please."

"It's only once a year, sir," pleaded Bob, appearing from the tank. "It shall not be repeated. I was making rather merry yesterday, sir."

"Now, I'll tell you what, my friend," said Scrooge, "I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore," he continued, leaping from his stool and giving Bob such a dig in the waistcoat that he staggered back into the tank again, "and therefore I am about to raise your salary!"

Bob trembled, and got a little nearer to the ruler. He had a momentary idea of knocking Scrooge down with it, holding him, and calling to the people in the court for help and a straight waistcoat.

"A merry Christmas, Bob!" said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken as he clapped him on the back. "A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year! I'll raise your salary and endeavor to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob! Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit!"

Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh and little heeded them, for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe for good at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and knowing that such as these would be blind anyway, he thought it quite as well that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins as have the malady in less attractive forms. His own heart laughed; and that was quite enough for him.

He had no further intercourse with spirits, but lived upon the total-abstinence principle ever afterward; and it was always said of him that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless us, every one!

THE CHIMES.

FIRST QUARTER.

THERE are not many people—and as it is desirable that a story-teller and a story-reader should establish a mutual understanding as soon as possible, I beg it to be noticed that I confine this observation neither to young people nor to little people, but extend it to all conditions of people: little and big, young and old: yet growing up, or already growing down again—there are not, I say, many people who would care to sleep in a church. I don't mean at sermon-time in warm weather (when the thing has actually been done, once or twice), but in the night and alone. A great multitude of persons will be violently astonished, I know, by this position in the broad bold day. But it applies to night. It must be argued by night, and I will undertake to maintain it successfully on any gusty winter's night appointed for the purpose, with any one opponent chosen from the rest, who will meet me singly in an old churchyard, before an old church door, and will previously empower me to lock him in, if needful to his satisfaction, until morning.

For the night wind has a dismal trick of wandering round and round a building of that sort, and moaning as it goes; and of trying, with its unseen hand, the windows and the doors; and seeking out some crevices by which to enter. And when it has got in, as one not finding what it seeks, whatever that may be, it wails and howls to issue forth again: and not content with stalking through the aisles, and gliding round and round the pillars, and tempting the deep organ, soars up to the roof and strives to rend the rafters: then flings itself despairingly upon the stones below, and passes, muttering, into the vaults. Anon, it comes up stealthily, and creeps along the walls, seeming to read in whispers the inscriptions sacred to the dead. At some of these it breaks out shrilly, as with laughter; and at others, moans and cries as if it were lamenting. It has a ghostly sound too, lingering within the altar; where it seems to chant, in its wild way, of wrong and murder done, and false gods worshiped, in defiance of the Tables of the Law, which look so fair and smooth, but are so flawed and broken. Ugh! Heaven preserve us, sitting snugly round the fire! It has an awful voice, that wind at midnight singing in a church!

But high up in the steeple! There the foul blast roars and whistles! High up in the steeple, where it is free to come and go through many an airy arch and loophole, and to twist and twine itself about the giddy stair, and twirl the groaning weathercock, and make the very tower shake and shiver! High up in the steeple, where the belfry is, and iron rails are ragged with rust, and sheets of lead and copper, shriveled by the changing weather, crackle and heave beneath the unaccustomed tread; and birds stuff shabby nests into corners of old oaken joists and beams; and dust grows old and gray; and speckled spiders, indolent and fat with long security, swing idly to and fro in the vibration of the bells, and never loose their hold upon their thread-spun castles in the air or climb up sailor-like in quick alarm, or drop upon the ground and ply a score of nimble legs to save one life! High up in the steeple of an old church, far above the light and murmur of the town and far below the flying clouds that shadow it, is the wild and dreary place at night: and high up in the steeple of an old church dwelt the chimes I tell of.

They were old chimes, trust me. Centuries ago, these bells had been baptized by bishops; so many centuries ago that the register of their baptism was lost long, long before the memory of man, and no one knew their names. They had had their godfathers and godmothers, these bells (for my own part, by the way, I would rather incur the responsibility of being godfather to a bell than a boy), and had their silver mugs, no doubt, besides. But time had mowed down their sponsors and Henry the Eighth had melted down their mugs; and they now hung, nameless and mugless, in the church tower.

Not speechless, though. Far from it. They had clear, loud, lusty, sounding voices, had these bells; and far and wide they might be heard upon the wind. Much too sturdy chimes were they to be dependent on the pleasure of the wind, moreover; for, fighting gallantly against it when it took an adverse whim, they would pour their cheerful notes into a listening ear right royally; and bent on being heard, on stormy nights, by some poor mother watching a sick child, or some lone wife whose husband was at sea, they had been sometimes known to beat a blustering nor'wester; ay, "all to fits," as Toby Veck said—for though they chose to call him Trotty Veck, his name was Toby, and nobody could make it anything else either (except Tobias) without a special act of Parliament; he having been as lawfully christened in his day as the bells had been in theirs, though with not quite so much of solemnity or public rejoicing.

For my part, I confess myself of Toby Veck's belief, for I am sure he had opportunities enough of forming a correct one. And whatever Toby Veck said, I say. And I take my stand by Toby Veck, although he did stand all day long (and weary work it was) just outside the church door. In fact he was a ticket-porter, Toby Veck, and waited there for jobs.

And a breezy, goose-skinned, blue-nosed, red-eyed, stony-toed, tooth-chattering place it was to wait in in the winter-time, as Toby Veck well knew. The wind came tearing round the corner—especially the east wind—as if it had sallied forth, express, from the confines of the earth, to have a blow at Toby. And oftentimes it seemed to come upon him sooner than it expected, for bouncing round the corner and passing Toby, it would suddenly wheel round again as if it cried, "Why, here he is!" Incontinently his little white apron would be caught up over his head like a naughty boy's garments, and his feeble little cane would be seen to wrestle and struggle unavailingly in his hand, and his legs would undergo tremendous agitation, and Toby himself, all aslant, and facing now in this direction, now in that, would be so banged and buffeted, and touzled, and worried, and hustled, and lifted off his feet as to render it a state of things but one degree removed from a positive miracle that he wasn't carried up bodily into the air as a colony of frogs or snails or other very portable creatures sometimes are, and rained down again, to the great astonishment of the natives, on some strange corner of the world where ticket-porters are unknown.

But windy weather, in spite of its using him so roughly, was, after all, a sort of holiday for Toby. That's the fact. He didn't seem to wait so long for a sixpence in the wind as at other times: the having to fight with that boisterous element took off his attention, and quite freshened him up when he was getting hungry and low-spirited. A hard frost, too, or a fall of snow was an event; and it seemed to do him good, somehow or other—it would have been hard to say in what respect, though, Toby! So wind and frost and snow, and perhaps a good stiff storm of hail, were Toby Veck's red-letter days.

Wet weather was the worst; the cold, damp, clammy wet, that wrapped him up like a moist great-coat—the only kind of great-coat Toby owned, or could have added to his comfort by dispensing with. Wet days, when the rain came slowly, thickly, obstinately down; when the street's throat, like his own, was choked with mist; when smoking umbrellas passed and repassed, spinning round and round like so many teetotums as they knocked against each other on the crowded footway, throwing off a little whirlpool of uncomfortable sprinklings; when gutters brawled and waterspouts were full and noisy; when the wet from the projecting stones and ledges of the church fell drip, drip, on Toby, making the wisp of straw on which he stood mere mud in no time; those were the days that tried him. Then, indeed, you might see Toby looking anxiously out from his shelter in an angle of the church wall—such a meager shelter that in summer-time it never cast a shadow thicker than a good-sized walking-stick upon the sunny pavement—with a disconsolate and lengthened face. But coming out a minute afterward to warm himself by exercise, and trotting up and down several times, he would brighten even then, and go back more brightly to his niche.

They called him Trotty from his pace, which meant speed if it didn't make it. He could have walked faster perhaps; most likely; but rob him of his trot and Toby would have taken to his bed and died. It bespattered him with mud in dirty weather; it cost him a world of trouble; he could have walked with infinitely greater ease; but that was one reason for his clinging to it so tenaciously.

A weak, small, spare, old man he was a very Hercules, this Toby, in his good intentions. He loved to earn his money. He delighted to believe—Toby was very poor and couldn't well afford to part with a delight—that he was worth his salt. With a shilling or an eighteenpenny message or small parcel in his hand, his courage, always high, rose higher. As he trotted on he would call out to fast postmen ahead of him to get out of the way; devoutly believing that in the natural course of things he must inevitably overtake and run them down; and he had perfect faith—not often tested—in his being able to carry anything that man could lift.

Thus, even when he came out of his nook to warm himself on a wet day, Toby trotted. Making, with his leaky shoes, a crooked line of slushy footprints in the mire; and blowing on his chilly hands and rubbing them against each other, poorly defended from the searching cold by threadbare mufflers of gray worsted, with a private apartment only for the thumb, and a common room or tap for the rest of the fingers; Toby, with his knees bent and his cane beneath his arm, still trotted. Falling out into the road to look up at the belfry when the chimes resounded, Toby trotted still.

He made this last excursion several times a day, for they were company to him; and when he heard their voices, he had an interest in glancing at their lodging-place and thinking how they were moved and what hammers beat upon them. Perhaps he was the more curious about these bells because there were points of resemblance between themselves and him. They hung there in all weathers with the wind and rain driving in upon them; facing only the outsides of all those houses; never getting any nearer to the blazing fires that gleamed and shone upon the windows, or came puffing out of the chimney tops; and incapable of participation in any of the good things that were constantly being handed through the street doors and the area railings to prodigious cooks. Faces came and went at many windows; sometimes pretty faces, youthful faces, pleasant faces: sometimes the reverse: but Toby knew no more (though he often speculated on these trifles, standing idle in the streets) whence they came, or where they went, or whether, when the lips moved, one kind word was said of him in all the year than did the chimes themselves.

Toby was not a casuist—that he knew of, at least—and I don't mean to say that when he began to take to the bells, and to knit up his first rough acquaintance with them into something of a closer and more delicate woof, he passed through these considerations one by one, or held any formal review or great field-day in his thoughts. But what I mean to say and do say is that as the functions of Toby's body, his digestive organs for example, did of their own cunning, and by a great many operations of which he was altogether ignorant, and the knowledge of which would have astonished him very much, arrive at a certain end, so his mental faculties, without his privity or concurrence, set all these wheels and springs in motion, with a thousand others, when they worked to bring about his liking for the bells.

And though I had said his love, I would not have recalled the word, though it would scarcely have expressed his complicated feeling. For being but a simple man, he invested them with a strange and solemn character. They were so mysterious, often heard and never seen; so high up, so far off, so full of such a deep, strong melody, that he regarded them with a species of awe; and sometimes when he looked up at the dark arched windows in the tower, he half-expected to be beckoned to by something which was not a bell, and yet was what he had heard so often sounding in the chimes. For all this, Toby scouted with indignation a certain flying rumor that the chimes were haunted, as implying the possibility of their being connected with any evil thing. In short, they were very often in his ears and very often in his thoughts, but always in his good opinion: and he very often got such a crick in his neck by staring with his mouth wide open at the steeple where they hung, that he was fain to take an extra trot or two afterward, to cure it.

The very thing he was in the act of doing one cold day, when the last drowsy sound of twelve o'clock just struck was humming like a melodious monster of a bee, and not by any means a busy bee, all through the steeple!

"Dinner-time, eh!" said Toby, trotting up and down before the church. "Ah!"

Toby's nose was very red, and his eyelids were very red, and he winked very much, and his shoulders were very near his ears, and his legs were very stiff, and altogether he was evidently a long way upon the frosty side of cool.

"Dinner-time, eh!" repeated Toby, using his right-hand muffler like an infantine boxing-glove, and punishing his chest for being cold. "Ah-h-h-h!"

He took a silent trot after that for a minute or two.

"There's nothing," said Toby ,breaking forth afresh—but here he stopped short in his trot, and with a face of great interest and some alarm felt his nose carefully all the way up. It was but a little way (not being much of a nose) and he had soon finished.

"I thought it was gone," said Toby, trotting off again. "It's all right, however. I am sure I couldn't blame it if it was to go. It has a precious hard service of it in the bitter weather, and precious little to look forward to; for I don't take snuff myself. It's a good deal tried, poor creetur, at the best of times; for when it *does* get hold of a pleasant whiff or so (which ain't too often), it's generally from somebody's else's dinner a-coming home from the baker's."

The reflection reminded him of that other reflection, which he had left unfinished.

"There's nothing," said Toby, 'more regular in its coming round than dinner-time, and nothing less regular in its coming round than dinner. That's the great difference between 'em. It's took me a long time to find it out. I wonder whether it would be worth any gentleman's while, now, to buy that obserwation for the papers; or the Parliament!"

Toby was only joking, for he gravely shook his head in self-depreciation.

"Why! Lord!" said Toby. "The papers is full of obserwations as it is; and so's the Parliament. Here's last week's paper, now;" taking a very dirty one from his pocket and holding it from him at arms' length; "full of obserwations! Full of obserwations! I like to know the news as well as any man," said Toby slowly; folding it a little smaller and putting it in his pocket again; "but it almost goes against the grain with me to read a paper now. It frightens me almost. I don't know what we poor people are coming to. Lord send we may be coming to something better in the new year nigh upon us!"

"Why, father, father," said a pleasant voice hard by.

But Toby, not hearing it, continued to trot backward and forward: musing as he went, and talking to himself.

"It seems as if we can't go right, or do right, or be righted," said Toby. "I hadn't much schooling myself when I was young; and I can't make out whether we have any business on the face of the earth or not. Sometimes I think we must have—a little; and sometimes I think we must be intruding. I get so puzzled sometimes that I am not even able to make up my mind whether there is any good at all in us or whether we are born bad. We seem to be dreadful things; we seem to give a deal of trouble; we are always being complained of and guarded against. One way or other, we fill the papers. Talk of a new year!" said Toby mournfully. "I can bear up as well as another man at most times; better than a good many, for I am as strong as a lion, and all men ain't; but supposing it should really be that we have no right to a new year—supposing we really *are* intruding——"

"Why, father, father!" said the pleasant voice again.

Toby heard it this time; started; stopped; and shortening his sight, which had been directed a long way off as seeking the enlightenment in the very heart of the approaching year, found himself face to face with his own child, and looking close into her eyes.

Bright eyes they were. Eyes that would bear a world of looking in before their depth was fathomed. Dark eyes, that reflected back the eyes which searched them; not flashingly, or at the owner's will, but with a clear, calm, honest, patient radiance, claiming kindred with that light which Heaven called into being. Eyes that were beautiful and true, and beaming with hope. With hope so young and fresh; with hope so buoyant, vigorous, and bright, despite the twenty years of work and poverty on which they had looked; that they became a voice to Trotty Veck, and said: "I think we have some business here—a little!"

Trotty kissed the lips belonging to the eyes, and squeezed the blooming face between his hands.

"Why, pet," said Trotty. "What's to do? I didn't expect you to-day, Meg."

"Neither did I expect to come, father," cried the girl, nodding her head and smiling as she spoke. "But here I am! And not alone; not alone!"

"Why, you don't mean to say," observed Trotty, looking curiously at a covered basket wihch she carried in her hand, "that you——"

"Smell it, father dear," said Meg. "Only smell it!"

Trotty was going to lift up the cover at once, in a great hurry, when she gayly interposed her hand.

"No, no, no," said Meg, with the glee of a child. "Lengthen it out a little. Let me just lift up the corner; just the lit-tle ti-ny cor-ner, you know," said Meg, suiting the action to the word with the utmost gentleness, and speaking very softly, as if she were afraid of being overheard by something inside the basket; "there. Now. What's that?"

Toby took the shortest possible sniff at the edge of the basket, and cried out in a rapture:

"Why, it's hot!"

"It's burning hot!" cried Meg. "Ha! ha! ha! It's scalding hot!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Toby, with a sort of kick. "It's scalding hot."

"But what is it, father?" said Meg. "Come. You haven't guessed what it is. And you must guess what it is. I can't think of taking it out till you guess what it is. Don't be in such a hurry! Wait a minute! A little bit more of the cover. Now guess!"

Meg was in a perfect fright lest he should guess right too soon; shrinking away as she held the basket toward him; curling up her pretty shoulders; stopping her ear with her hand, as if by so doing she could keep the right word out of Toby's lips; and laughing softly the whole time.

Meanwhile Toby, putting a hand on each knee, bent down his nose to the basket and took a long inspiration at the lid; the grin upon his withered face expanding in the process as if he were inhaling laughing gas.

"Ah! It's very nice," said Toby. "It ain't—I suppose it ain't polonies?"

"No! no! no!" cried Meg, delighted. "Nothing like polonies!"

"No," said Toby, after another sniff. "It's—it's mellower than polonies. It's very nice. It improves every moment. It's too decided for trotters. Ain't it?"

Meg was in an ecstasy. He could not have gone wider of the mark than trotters--except polonies.

"Liver?" said Toby, communing with himself. "No. There's a mildness about it that don't answer to liver. Pettitoes? No. It ain't faint enough for pettitoes. It wants the stringiness of cocks' heads. And I know it ain't sausages. I'll tell you what it is. It's chitterlings!"

"No, it ain't!" cried Meg in a burst of delight. "No, it ain't!"

"Why, what am I a-thinking of!" said Toby, suddenly recovering a position as near the perpendicular as it was possible for him to assume. "I shall forget my own name next. It's tripe!"

Tripe it was; and Meg, in high joy, protested he should say, in half a minute more, it was the best tripe ever stewed.

"And so," said Meg, busying herself exultingly with the basket, "I'll lay the cloth at once, father; for I have brought the tripe in a basin, and tied the basin up in a pocket-handkerchief; and if I like to be proud for once, and spread that for a cloth, and call it a cloth, there's no law to prevent me; is there, father?"

"Not that I know of, my dear," said Toby. "But they're always a-bringing up some new law or other."

"And according to what I was reading you in the paper the other day, father—what the judge said, you know—we poor people are supposed to know them all. Ha! ha! What a mistake! My goodness me, how clever they think us!"

"Yes, my dear," cried Trotty; "and they'd be very fond of any one of us that *did* know 'em all. He'd grow fat upon the work he'd get, that man, and be popular with the gentlefolks in his neighborhood. Very much so!"

"He'd eat his dinner with an appetite, whoever he was, if it smelled like this," said Meg cheerfully. "Make haste, for there's a hot potato besides, and half a pint of fresh-drawn beer in a bottle. Where will you dine, father? On the post, or on the steps? Dear, dear, how grand we are. Two places to choose from!"

"The steps to-day, my pet," said Trotty. "Steps in dry weather. Post in wet. There's a greater conveniency in the steps at all times, because of the sitting down; but they're rheumatic in the damp."

"Then here," said Meg, clapping her hands after a moment's bustle; "here it is, all ready! And beautiful it looks! Come, father. Come!"

Since his discovery of the contents of the basket, Trotty had been standing looking at her—and had been speaking too—in an abstracted manner, which showed that though she was the object of his thoughts and eyes, to the exclusion even of tripe, he neither saw nor thought about her as she was at that moment, but had before him some imaginary rough sketch or drama of her future life. Roused now by her cheerful summons, he shook off a melancholy shake of the head which was just coming upon him, and trotted to her side. As he was stooping to sit down, the chimes rang.

"Amen!" said Trotty, pulling off his hat and looking up toward them.

"Amen to the bells, father?" cried Meg.

"They broke in like a grace, my dear," said Trotty, taking his seat. "They'd say a good one, I am sure, if they could. Many's the kind thing they say to me."

"The bells do, father!" laughed Meg as she set the basin and a knife and fork before him. "Well!"

"Seem to, my pet," said Trotty, falling to with great vigor. "And where's the difference? If I hear 'em, what does it matter whether they speak it or not? Why, bless you, my dear," said Toby, pointing at the tower with his fork, and becoming more animated under the influence of dinner, "how often have I heard them bells say, 'Toby Veck, Toby Veck, keep a good heart, Toby! Toby Veck, Toby Veck, keep a good heart, Toby!' A million times? More!"

"Well, I never!" cried Meg.

She had, though—over and over again. For it was Toby's constant topic.

"When things is very bad," said Trotty, "very bad indeed, I mean—almost at the worst—then it's 'Toby Veck, Toby Veck, job coming soon, Toby! Toby Veck, Toby Veck, job coming soon, Toby!' That way."

"And it comes—at last, father," said Meg, with a touch of sadness in her pleasant voice.

"Always," answered the unconscious Toby. "Never fails."

While this discourse was holding, Trotty made no pause in his attack upon the savory meat before him, but cut and ate, and cut and drank, and cut and chewed, and dodged about, from tripe to hot potato, and from hot potato back again to tripe, with an unctuous and unflagging relish. But happening now to look all round the street—in case anybody should be beckoning from any door or window for a porter—his eyes, in coming back again, encountered Meg, sitting opposite to him with her arms folded, and only busy in watching his progress with a smile of happiness.

"Why, Lord forgive me!" said Trotty, dropping his knife and fork. "My dove! Meg! why didn't you tell me what a beast I was?"

"Father?"

"Sitting here," said Trotty in penitent explanation, "cramming, and stuffing, and gorging myself; and you before me there, never so much as breaking your precious fast, nor wanting to, when——"

"But I have broken it, father," interposed his daughter, laughing, "all to bits. I have had my dinner."

"Nonsense," said Trotty. "Two dinners in one day! It ain't possible! You might as well tell me that two New Year's Days will come together, or that I have had a gold head all my life and never changed it."

"I have had my dinner, father, for all that," said Meg, coming nearer to him. "And if you'll go on with yours, I'll tell you how and where; and how your dinner came to be brought; and—and something else besides."

Toby still appeared incredulous; but she looked into his face with her clear eyes, and laying her hand upon his shoulder, motioned him to go on while the meat was hot. So Trotty took up his knife and fork again, and went to work. But much more slowly than before, and shaking his head, as if he were not at all pleased with himself.

"I had my dinner, father," said Meg after a little hesitation, "with—with Richard. His dinner-time was early; and as he brought his dinner with him when he came to see me, we—we had it together, father."

Trotty took a little beer, and smacked his lips. Then he said, "Oh!"—because she waited.

"And Richard says, father——" Meg resumed. Then stopped.

"What does Richard say, Meg?" asked Toby.

"Richard says, father——" Another stoppage.

"Richard's a long time saying it," said Toby.

"He says, then, father," Meg continued, lifting up her eyes at last, and speaking in a tremble, but quite plainly, "another year is nearly gone, and where is the use of waiting on from year to year, when it is so unlikely we shall ever be better off than we are now? He says we are poor now, father, and we shall be poor then, but we are young now, and years will make us old before we know it. He says that if we wait—people in our condition—until we see our way quite clearly, the way will be a narrow one indeed—the common way—the grave, father."

A bolder man than Trotty Veck must needs have drawn upon his boldness largely to deny it. Trotty held his peace.

"And how hard, father, to grow old and die, and think we might have cheered and helped each other! How hard in all our lives to love each other; and to grieve, apart, to see each other working, changing, growing old and gray. Even if I got the better of it, and forgot him (which I never could), oh, father dear, how hard to have a heart so full as mine is now, and live to have it slowly drained out every drop, without the recollection of one happy moment of a woman's life to stay behind and comfort me, and make me better!"

Trotty sat quite still. Meg dried her eyes, and said more gayly; that is to say, with here a laugh, and there a sob, and here a laugh and sob together:

"So Richard says, father, as his work was yesterday made certain for some time to come, and as I love him, and have loved him full three years—ah! longer than that, if he knew it!—will I marry him on New Year's Day; the best and happiest day, he says,in the whole year, and one that is almost sure to bring good fortune with it. It's a short notice, father—isn't it?—but I haven't my fortune to be settled, or my wedding-dresses to be made, like the great ladies, father, have I? And he said so much, and said it in his way; so strong and earnest, and all the time so kind and gentle; that I said I'd come and talk to you, father. And as they paid the money for that work of mine this morning (unexpectedly, I am sure!), and as you have fared very poorly for a whole week, and as I couldn't help wishing there should be something to make this day a sort of holiday to you as well as a dear and happy day to me, father, I made a little treat and brought it to surprise you."

"And see how he leaves it cooling on the step!" said another voice.

It was the voice of this same Richard, who had come upon them unobserved, and stood before the father and daughter; looking down upon them with a face as glowing as the iron on which his stout sledge-hammer daily rang. A handsome, well-made, powerful youngster he was; with eyes that sparkled like the red-hot droppings from a furnace fire; black hair that curled about his swarthy temples rarely; and a smile—a smile that bore out Meg's eulogium on his style of conversation.

"See how he leaves it cooling on the step!" said Richard. "Meg don't know what he likes. Not she!"

Trotty, all action and enthusiasm, immediately reached up his hand to Richard, and was going to address him in a great hurry, when the house-door opened without any warning, and a footman very nearly put his foot into the tripe.

"Out of the vays here, will you! You must always go and be a-settin on our steps, must you! You can't go and give a turn to none of the neighbors never, can't you! Will you clear the road, or won't you?"

Strictly speaking, the last question was irrelevant, as they had already done it.

"What's the matter—what's the matter?" said the gentleman for whom the door was opened; coming out of the house at that kind of light-heavy pace—that peculiar compromise between a walk and a jog trot—with which a gentleman upon the smooth down-hill of life, wearing creaking boots, a watch-chain, and clean linen, may come out of his house: not only without any abatement of his dignity, but with an expression of having important and wealthy engagements elsewhere. "What's the matter? What's the matter?"

"You're always a-being begged, and prayed, upon your bended knees you are," said the footman with great emphasis to Trotty Veck, "to let our door-steps be. Why don't you let 'em be? Can't you let 'em be?"

"There! That'll do! That'll do!" said the gentleman. "Halloo there! Porter!" beckoning with his head to Trotty Veck. "Come here. What's that? Your dinner?"

"Yes, sir," said Trotty, leaving it behind him in a corner.

"Don't leave it there," exclaimed the gentleman. "Bring it here, bring it here. So! This is your dinner, is it?"

"Yes, sir," repeated Trotty, looking with a fixed eye and a watery mouth at the piece of tripe he had reserved for a last delicious tit-bit, which the gentleman was now turning over and over on the end of the fork.

Two other gentlemen had come out with him. One was a low-spirited gentleman of middle age, of a meager habit and a disconsolate face, who kept his hands continually in the pockets of his scanty pepper-and-salt trousers, very large and dog's-eared from that custom, and was not particularly well brushed or washed. The other, a full-sized, sleek, well-conditioned gentleman, in a blue coat with bright buttons and a white cravat. This gentleman had a very red face, as if an undue proportion of the blood in his body were squeezed up into his head; which perhaps accounted for his having also the appearance of being rather cold about the heart.

He who had Toby's meat upon the fork called to the first one by the name of Filer, and they both drew near together. Mr. Filer, being exceedingly short-sighted, was obliged to go so close to the remnant of Toby's dinner before he could make out what it was that Toby's heart leaped up into his mouth. But Mr. Filer didn't eat it.

"This is a description of animal food, alderman," said Filer, making little punches in it with a pencil-case, "commonly known to the laboring population of this country by the name of tripe."

The alderman laughed and winked; for he was a merry fellow, Alderman Cute. Oh, and a sly fellow too! A knowing fellow. Up to everything. Not to be imposed upon. Deep in the people's hearts! He knew them, Cute did. I believe you!

"But who eats tripe? ' said Mr. Filer, looking round. "Tripe is without an exception the least economical and the most wasteful article of consumption that the markets of this country can by possibility produce. The loss upon a pound of tripe has been found to be, in the boiling, seven-eighths of a fifth more than the loss upon a pound of any other animal substance whatever. Tripe is more expensive, properly understood, than the hot-house pineapple. Taking into account the number of animals slaughtered yearly within the bills of mortality alone, and forming a low estimate of the quantity of tripe which the carcasses of those animals, reasonably well butchered, would yield, I find that the waste on that amount of tripe, if boiled, would victual a garrison of five hundred men for five months, of thirty-one days each, and a February over. The waste, the waste!"

Trotty stood aghast, and his legs shook under him. He seemed to have starved a garrison of five hundred men with his own hand.

"Who eats tripe?" said Mr. Filer warmly. "Who eats tripe?"

Trotty made a miserable bow.

"You do, do you?" said Mr. Filer. "Then I'll tell you something. You snatch your tripe my friend, out of the mouths of widows and orphans."

"I hope not, sir," said Trotty faintly. "I'd sooner die of want!"

"Divide the amount of tripe before mentioned, alderman," said Mr. Filer, "by the estimated number of existing widows and orphans, and the result will be one pennyweight of tripe to each. Not a grain is left for that man. Consequently, he's a robber."

Trotty was so shocked that it gave him no concern to see the alderman finish the tripe himself. It was a relief to get rid of it, anyhow.

"And what do you say?" asked the alderman jocosely of the red-faced gentleman in the blue coat. "You have heard friend Filer. What do you say?"

"What's it possible to say?" returned the gentleman. "What is to be said? Who can take any interest in a fellow like this," meaning Trotty, "in such degenerate times as these? Look at him! What an object! The good old times, the grand old times, the great old times! Those were the times for a bold peasantry, and all that sort of thing. Those were the times for every sort of thing, in fact. There's nothing nowadays. Ah!" sighed the red-faced gentleman, "the good old times, the good old times!"

The gentleman didn't specify what particular times he alluded to; nor did he say whether he objected to the present times from a disinterested consciousness that they had done nothing very remarkable in producing himself.

"The good old times, the good old times," repeated the gentleman. "What times they were! They were the only times. It's of no use talking about any other times, or discussing what the people are in these times. You don't call these times, do you? I don't. Look into Strutt's Costumes, and see what a porter used to be in any of the good old English reigns."

"He hadn't, in his very best circumstances, a shirt to his back or a stocking to his foot; and there was scarcely a vegetable in all England for him to put into his mouth," said Mr. Filer. "I can prove it by tables."

But still the red-faced gentleman extolled the good old times, the grand old times, the great old times. No matter what anybody else said, he still went turning round and round in one set form of words concerning them; as a poor squirrel turns and turns in its revolving cage; touching the mechanism and trick of which it has probably quite as distinct perceptions as ever this red-faced gentleman had of his deceased millennium.

It is possible that poor Trotty's faith in these very vague old times was not entirely destroyed, for he felt vague enough at that moment. One thing, however, was plain to him in the midst of his distress; to wit, that however these gentlemen might differ in details, his misgivings of that morning and of many other morninngs were well founded. "No, no. We can't go right or do right," thought Trotty in despair. "There is no good in us. We are born bad!"

But Trotty had a father's heart within him, which had somehow got into his breast in spite of this decree; and he could not bear that Meg, in the blush of her brief joy, should have her fortune read by these wise gentlemen. "God help her," thought poor Trotty. "She will know it soon enough."

He anxiously signed, therefore, to the young smith to take her away. But he was so busy, talking to her softly at a little distance, that he only became conscious of this desire simultaneously with Alderman Cute. Now, the alderman had not yet had his say, but he was a philosopher, too—practical, though! Oh, very practical—and as he had no idea of losing any portion of his audience, he cried "Stop!"

"Now, you know," said the alderman, addressing his two friends with a self-complacent smile upon his face which was habitual to him, "I am a plain man and a practical man; and I go to work in a plain practical way. That's my way. There is not the least mystery or difficulty in dealing with this sort of people if you only understand 'em, and can talk to 'em in their own manner. Now, you porter! Don't you ever tell me, or anybody else, my friend, that you haven't always enough to eat, and of the best; because I know better. I have tasted your tripe, you know, and you can't 'chaff' me. You understand what 'chaff' means, eh? That's the right word, isn't it? Ha! ha! ha! Lord bless you," said the alderman, turning to his friends again, "it's the easiest thing on earth to deal with this sort of people if you understand 'em."

Famous man for the common people, Alderman Cute! Never out of temper with them! Easy, affable, joking, knowing gentleman!

"You see, my friend," pursued the alderman, "there's a great deal of nonsense talked about want—'hard up,' you know; that's the phrase, isn't it? ha! ha! ha!—and I intend to put it down. There's a certain amount of cant in vogue about starvation, and I mean to put it down. That's all! Lord bless you," said the alderman, turning to his friends again, "you may put down anything among this sort of people, if you only know the way to set about it."

Trotty took Meg's hand and drew it through his arm. He didn't seem to know what he was doing, though.

"Your daughter, eh?" said the alderman, chucking her familiarly under the chin.

Always affable with the working classes, Alderman Cute! Knew what pleased them! Not a bit of pride!

"Where's her mother?" asked that worthy gentleman.

"Dead," said Toby. "Her mother got up linen; and was called to heaven when she was born."

"Not to get up linen there, I suppose," remarked the alderman pleasantly.

Toby might or might not have been able to separate his wife in heaven from her old pursuits. But query: If Mrs. Alderman Cute had gone to heaven, would Mr. Alderman Cute have pictured her as holding any state or station there?

"And you're making love to her, are you?" said Cute to the young smith.

"Yes," returned Richard quickly, for he was nettled by the question. "And we are going to be married on New Year's Day."

"What do you mean!" cried Filer sharply. "Married!"

"Why, yes, we're thinking of it, master," said Richard. "We're rather in a hurry, you see, in case it should be put down first."

"Ah!" cried Filer with a groan. "Put that down indeed, alderman, and you'll do something. Married! married!! The ignorance of the first principles of political economy on the part of these people, their improvidence, their wickedness, is, by heavens! enough to— Now look at that couple, will you?"

Well? They were worth looking at. And marriage seemed as reasonable and fair a deed as they need have in contemplation.

"A man may live to be as old as Methuselah," said Mr. Filer, "and may labor all his life for the benefit of such people as those; and may heap up facts on figures, facts on figures, facts on figures, mountains high and dry; and he can no more hope to persuade 'em that they have no right or business to be married than he can hope to persuade 'em that they have no earthly right or business to be born. And that we know they haven't. We reduced it to a mathematical certainty long ago!"

Alderman Cute was mightily diverted, and laid his right forefinger on the side of his nose, as much as to say to both his friends, "Observe me, will you! Keep your eye on the practical man!"—and called Meg to him.

"Come here, my girl!" said Alderman Cute.

The young blood of her lover had been mounting wrathfully within the last few minutes; and he was indisposed to let her come. But, setting a constraint upon himself, he came forward with a stride as Meg approached, and stood beside her. Trotty kept her hand within his arm still, but looked from face to face as wildly as a sleeper in a dream.

"Now, I'm going to give you a word or two of good advice, my girl," said the alderman in his nice easy way. "It's my place to give advice, you know, because I'm a justice You know I'm a justice, don't you?"

Meg timidly said, "Yes." But everybody knew Alderman Cute was a justice! Oh, dear, so active a justice always! Who such a mote of brightness in the public eye as Cute!

"You are going to be married, you say," pursued the alderman. "Very unbecoming and indelicate in one of your sex! But never mind that. After you are married you'll quarrel with your husband and come to be a distressed wife. You may think not; but you will, because I tell you so. Now, I give you fair warning that I have made up my mind to put distressed wives down. So don't be brought before me. You'll have children—boys. Those boys will grow up bad, of course, and run wild in the streets, without shoes and stockings. Mind, my young friend! I'll convict 'em summarily, every one, for I am determined to put boys without shoes and stockings down. Perhaps your husband will die young (most likely) and leave you with a baby. Then you'll be turned out of doors, and wander up and down the streets. Now, don't wander near me, my dear, for I am resolved to put all wandering mothers down. All young mothers, of all sorts and kinds, it's my determination to put down. Don't think to plead illness as an excuse with me; or babies as an excuse with me: for all sick persons and young children (I hope you know the church service, but I'm afraid not) I am determined to put down. And if you attempt, desperately, and ungratefully, and impiously, and fraudulently attempt to drown yourself, or hang yourself, I'll have no pity for you, for I have made up my mind to put all suicide down! If there is one thing," said the alderman, with his self-satisfied smile, "on which I can be said to have made up my mind more than on another, it is to put suicide down. So don't try it on. That's the phrase, isn't it? Ha! ha! now we understand each other."

Toby knew not whether to be agonized or glad, to see that Meg had turned a deadly white, and dropped her lover's hand.

"And as for you, you dull dog," said the alderman, turning with even increased cheerfulness and urbanity to the young smith, "what are you thinking of being married for? What do you want to be married for, you silly fellow? If I was a fine, young, strapping chap like you, I should be ashamed of being milksop enough to pin myself to a woman's apron-strings! Why, she'll be an old woman before you're a middle-aged man! And a pretty figure you'll cut then, with a draggle-tailed wife and a crowd of squalling children crying after you wherever you go!"

Oh, he knew how to banter the common people, Alderman Cute!

"There! Go along with you," said the alderman, "and repent. Don't make such a fool of yourself as to get married on New Year's Day. You'll think very differently of it long before next New Year's Day: a trim young fellow like you, with all the girls looking after you. There! Go along with you!"

They went along. Not arm in arm, or hand in hand, or interchanging bright glances; but she in tears, he gloomy and down-looking. Were these the hearts that had so lately made old Toby's leap up from its faintness? No, no. The alderman (a blessing on his head!) had put them down.

"As you happen to be here," said the alderman to Toby, "you shall carry a letter for me. Can you be quick? You're an old man."

Toby, who had been looking after Meg quite stupidly, made shift to murmur out that he was very quick and very strong.

"How old are you?" inquired the alderman.

"I'm over sixty, sir," said Toby.

"Oh! This man's a great deal pastt he average age, you know," cried Mr. Filer, breaking in as if his patience would bear some trying, but this really was carrying matters a little too far.

"I feel I'm intruding, sir," said Toby. "I—I misdoubted it this morning. Oh, dear me!"

The alderman cut him short by giving him the letter from his pocket. Toby would have got a shilling too; but Mr. Filer clearly showing that in that case he would rob a certain given number of persons of ninepence-halfpenny apiece, he only got sixpence; and thought himself very well off to get that.

Then the alderman gave an arm to each of his friends and walked off in high feather; but he immediately came hurrying back alone, as if he had forgotten something.

"Porter!" said the alderman.

"Sir!" said Toby.

"Take care of that daughter of yours. She's much too handsome."

"Even her good looks are stolen from somebody or other, I suppose," thought Toby, looking at the sixpence in his hand and thinking of the tripe. "She's been and robbed five hundred ladies of a bloom apiece, I shouldn't wonder. It's very dreadful!"

"She's much too handsome, my man," repeated the alderman. "The chances are that she'll come to no good, I clearly see. Observe what I say. Take care of her!" With which he hurried off again.

"Wrong every way. Wrong every way!" said Trotty, clasping his hands. "Born bad. No business here!"

The chimes came clashing in upon him as he said the words. Full, loud, and sounding—but with no encouragement. No, not a drop.

"The tune's changed," cried the old man as he listened. "There's not a word of all that fancy in it. Why should there be? I have no business with the new year nor with the old one neither. Let me die!"

Still the bells, pealing forth their changes, made the very air spin. Put 'em down, put 'em down! Good old timges, good old times! Facts and figures, facts and figures! Put 'em down, put 'em down! If they said anything they said this until the brain of Toby reeled.

He pressed his bewildered head between his hands as if to keep it from splitting asunder. A well-timed action, as it happened; for finding the letter in one of them, and being by that means reminded of his charge, he fell mechanically into his usual trot and trotted off.

SECOND QUARTER.

The letter Toby had received from Alderman Cute was addressed to a great man in the great district of the town. The greatest district of the town. It must have been the greatest district of the town, because it was commonly called "the world" by its inhabitants.

The letter positively seemed heavier in Toby's hand than another letter. Not because the alderman had sealed it with a very large coat of arms and no end of wax, but because of the weighty name on the superscription, and the ponderous amount of gold and silver with which it was associated.

"How different from us!" thought Toby in all simplicity and earnestness as he looked at the direction. "Divide the lively turtles in the bills of mortality by the number of gentlefolks able to buy 'em, and whose share does he take but his own! As to snatching tripe from anybody's mouth—he'd scorn it!"

With the involuntary homage due to such an exalted character, Toby interposed a corner of his apron between the letter and his fingers.

"His children," said Trotty, and a mist rose before his eyes, "his daughters—gentlemen may win their hearts and marry them; they may be happy wives and mothers; they may be handsome like my darling M—e——"

He couldn't finish the name. The final letter swelled in his throat to the size of the whole alphabet.

"Never mind," thought Trotty. "I know what I mean. That's more than enough for me," and with this consolatory rumination, trotted on.

It was a hard frost, that day. The air was bracing, crisp, and clear. The wintry sun, though powerless for warmth, looked brightly down upon the ice it was too weak to melt, and set a radiant glory there. At other times Trotty might have learned a poor man's lesson from the wintry sun; but he was past that now.

The year was old that day. The patient year had lived through the reproaches and misuses of its slanderers, and faithfully performed its work. Spring, summer, autumn, winter. It had labored through the destined round, and now laid down its weary head to die. Shut out from hope, high impulse, active happiness itself, but active messenger of many joys to others, it made appeal in its decline to have its toiling days and patient hours remembered, and to die in peace. Trotty might have read a poor man's allegory in the fading year; but he was past that now.

And only he? Or has the like appeal been ever made by seventy years at once upon an English laborer's head, and made in vain?

The streets were full of motion and the shops were decked out gayly. The new year, like an infant heir to the whole world, was waited for with welcomes, presents, and rejoicings. There were books and toys for the new year, glittering trinkets for the new year, dresses for the new year, schemes of fortune for the new year; new inventions to beguile it. Its life was parceled out in almanacs and pocket-books; the coming of its moons, and stars, and tides was known beforehand to the moment; all the workings of its seasons in their days and nights were calculated with as much precision as Mr. Filer could work sums in men and women.

The new year, the new year. Everywhere the new year! The old year was already looked upon as dead; and its effects were selling cheap, like some drowned mariner's aboard ship. Its patterns were last year's and going at a sacrifice before its breath was gone. Its treasures were mere dirt beside the riches of its unborn successor!

Trotty had no portion, to his thinking, in the new year or the old.

"Put 'em down, put 'em down! Facts and figures, facts and figures! Good old times, good old times! Put 'em down, put 'em down!"—his trot went to that measure and would fit itself to nothing else.

But even that one, melancholy as it was, brought him in due time to the end of his journey. To the mansion of Sir Joseph Bowley, member of Parliament.

The door was opened by a porter. Such a porter! Not of Toby's order. Quite another thing. His place was the ticket, though; not Toby's.

This porter underwent somehard panting before he could speak, having breathed himself by coming incautiously out of his chair without first taking time to think about it and compose his mind. When he had found his voice—which it took him a long time to do, for it was a long way off, and hidden under a load of meat—he said in a fat whisper:

"Who's it from?"

Toby told him.

"You're to take it in yourself," said the porter, pointing to a room at the end of a long passage opening from the hall. "Everything goes straight in on this day of the year. You're not a bit too soon; for the carriage is at the door now, and they have only come to town for a couple of hours a purpose."

Toby wiped his feet (which were quite dry already) with great care, and took the way pointed out to him; observing as he went that it was an awfully grand house, but hushed and covered up, as if the family were in the country. Knocking at the room door, he was told to enter from within; and doing so found himself in a spacious library, where, at a table strewn with files and papers, were a stately lady in a bonnet, and a not very stately gentleman in black who wrote from her dictation; while another, and an older, and a much statelier gentleman, whose hat and cane were on the table, walked up and down, with one hand in his breast, and looked complacently from time to time at his own picture—a full length; a very full length—hanging over the fireplace.

"What is this?" said the last-named gentleman. "Mr. Fish, will you have the goodness to attend?"

Mr. Fish begged pardon, and taking the letter from Toby, handed it with great respect.

"From Alderman Cute, Sir Joseph."

"Is this all? Have you nothing else, porter?" inquired Sir Joseph.

Toby replied in the negative.

"You have no bill or demand upon me—my name is Bowley, Sir Joseph Bowley—of any kind from anybody, have you?" said Sir Joseph. "If you have, present it. There is a check-book by the side of Mr. Fish. I allow nothing to be carried into the new year. Every description of account is settled in this house at the close of the old one. So that if death was to—to——"

"To cut," suggested Mr. Fish.

"To sever, sir," returned Sir Joseph with great asperity, "the cord of existence—my affairs would be found, I hope, in a state of preparation."

"My dear Sir Joseph!" said the lady, who was greatly younger than the gentleman. "How shocking!"

"My Lady Bowley," returned Sir Joseph, floundering now and then, as in the great depth of his observations, "at this season of the year we should think of—of—ourselves. We should look into our—our accounts. We should feel that every return of so eventful a period in human transactions involves a matter of deep moment between a man and his—and his banker."

Sir Joseph delivered these words as if he felt the full morality of what he was saying, and desired that even Trotty should have an opportunity of being improved by such discourse. Possibly he had this end before him in still forbearing to break the seal of the letter, and in telling Trotty to wait where he was a minute.

"You were desiring Mr. Fish to say, my lady——" observed Sir Joseph.

"Mr. Fish has said that, I believe," returned his lady, glancing at the letter. "But, upon my word, Sir Joseph, I don't think I can let it go after all. It is so very dear."

"What is dear?" inquired Sir Joseph.

"That charity, my love. They only allow two votes for a subscription of £5. Really monstrous!"

"My Lady Bowley," returned Sir Joseph, "you surprise me. Is the luxury of feeling in proportion to the number of votes; or is it, to a rightly constituted mind, in proportion to the number of applicants and the wholesome state of mind to which their canvassing reduces them? Is there no excitement of the purest kind in having two votes to dispose of among fifty people?"

"Not to me, I acknowledge," replied the lady. "It bores one. Besides, one can't oblige one's acquaintance. But you are the poor man's friend, you know, Sir Joseph. You think otherwise."

"I am the poor man's friend," observed Sir Joseph, glancing at the poor man present. "As such I may be taunted. As such I have been taunted. But I ask no other title."

"Bless him for a noble gentleman!" thought Trotty.

"I don't agree with Cute here, for instance," said Sir Joseph, holding out the letter. "I don't agree with the Filer party. I don't agree with any party. My friend, the poor man, has no business with anything of that sort, and nothing of that sort has any business with him. My friend the poor man, in my district, is my business. No man or body of men has any right to interfere between my friend and me. That is the ground I take. I assume a—a paternal character toward my friend. I say, 'My good fellow, I will treat you paternally.'"

Toby listened with great gravity and began to feel more comfortable.

"Your only business, my good fellow," pursued Sir Joseph, looking abstractedly at Toby, "your only business in life is with me. You needn't trouble yourself to think about anything. I will think for you; I know what is good for you; I am your perpetual parent. Such is the dispensation of an all-wise Providence! Now, the design of your creation is—not that you should swill, and guzzle, and associate your enjoyments, brutally, with food;" Toby thought remorsefully of the tripe; "but that you should feel the dignity of labor. Go forth erect into the cheerful morning air, and—and stop there. Live hard and temperately, be respectful, exercise your self-denial, bring up your family on next to nothing, pay your rent as regularly as the clock strikes, be punctual in your dealings (I set you a good example; you will find Mr. Fish, my confidential secretary, with a cash-box before him at all times); and you may trust to me to be your friend and father."

"Nice children, indeed, Sir Joseph!" said the lady, with a shudder. "Rheumatisms, and fevers, and crooked legs, and asthmas, and all kinds of horrors!"

"My lady," returned Sir Joseph with solemnity, "not the less am I the poor man's friend and father. Not the less shall he receive encouragement at my hands. Every quarter-day he will be put in communication with Mr. Fish. Every New Year's Day, myself and friends will drink his health. Once every year, myself and friends will address him with the deepest feeling. Once in his life he may even perhaps receive—in public, in the presence of the gentry—a trifle from a friend. And when, upheld no more by these stimulants and the dignity of labor, he sinks into his comfortable grave, then, my lady"—here Sir Joseph blew his nose—"I will be a friend and a father—on the same terms—to his children."

Toby was greatly moved.

"Oh! you have a thankful family, Sir Joseph!" cried his wife.

"My lady," said Sir Joseph quite majestically, "ingratitude is known to be the sin of that class. I expect no other return."

"Ah! Born bad!" thought Toby. "Nothing melts us."

"What man can do, I do," pursued Sir Joseph. "I do my duty as the poor man's friend and father; and I endeavor to educate his mind by inculcating on all occasions the one great moral lesson which that class requires. That is, entire dependence on myself. They have no business whatever with—with themselves. If wicked and designing persons tell them otherwise, and they become impatient and discontented, and are guilty of insubordinate conduct and black-hearted ingratitude—which is undoubtedly the case—I am their friend and father still. It is so ordained. It is in the nature of things."

With that great sentiment he opened the alderman's letter and read it.

"Very polite and attentive, I am sure!" exclaimed Sir Joseph. "My lady, the alderman is so obliging as to remind me that he has had 'the distinguished honor'—he is very good—of meeting me at the house of our mutual friend Deedles, the banker; and he does me the favor to inquire whether it will be agreeable to me to have Will Fern put down."

"Most agreeable!" replied my Lady Bowley. "The worst man among them! He has been committing a robbery, I hope?"

"Why, no," said Sir Joseph, referring to the letter. "Not quite. Very near. Not quite. He came up to London, it seems, to look for employment (trying to better himself—that's his story), and being found at night asleep in a shed, was taken into custody and carried next morning before the alderman. The alderman observes (very properly) that he is determined to put this sort of thing down, and that if it will be agreeable to me to have Will Fern put down, he will be happy to begin with him."

"Let him be made an example of, by all means," returned the lady. "Last winter, when I introduced pinking and eyelet-holing among the men and boys in the village, as a nice evening employment, and had the lines,

"'Oh, let us love our occupations,
Bless the squire and his relations,
Live upon our daily rations,
And always know our proper stations,

set to music on the new system, for them to sing the while, this very Fern—I see him now—touched that hat of his, and said, 'I humbly ask your pardon, my lady, but ain't I something different from a great girl?' I expected it, of course; who can expect anything but insolence and ingratitude from that class of people? That is not to the purpose, however. Sir Joseph! Make an example of him!"

"Hem!" coughed Sir Joseph. "Mr. Fish, if you'll have the goodness to attend——"

Mr. Fish immediately seized his pen and wrote from Sir Joseph's dictation:

"Private. My Dear Sir: I am very much indebted to you for your courtesy in the matter of the man William Fern, of whom, I regret to add, I can say nothing favorable. I have uniformly considered myself in the light of his friend and father, but have been repaid (a common case, I grieve to say) with ingratitude and constant opposition to my plans. He is a turbulent and rebellious spirit. His character will not bear investigation. Nothing will persuade him to be happy when he might. Under these circumstances, it appears to me, I own, that when he comes before you again (as you informed me he promised to do to-morrow, pending your inquires, and I think he may be so far relied upon), his committal for some short term as a vagabond would be a service to society and would be a salutary example in a country where—for the sake of those who are, through good and evil report, the friends and fathers of the poor, as well as with a view to that, generally speaking, misguided class themselves—examples are greatly needed. And I am," and so forth.

"It appears," remarked Sir Joseph when he had signed this letter, and Mr. Fish was sealing it, "as if this were ordained: really. At the close of the year I wind up my account and strike my balance, even with William Fern!"

Trotty, who had long ago relapsed, and was very low-spirited, stepped forward with a rueful face to take the letter.

"With my compliments and thanks," said Sir Joseph. "Stop!"

"Stop!" echoed Mr. Fish.

"You have heard, perhaps," said Sir Joseph oracularly, "certain remarks into which I have been led respecting the solemn period of time at which we have arrived, and the duty imposed upon us of settling our affairs and being prepared. You have observed that I don't shelter myself behind my superior standing in society, but that Mr. Fish—that gentleman—has a check-book at his elbow, and is in fact here to enable me to turn over a perfectly new leaf and enter on the epoch before us with a clean account. Now, my friend, can you lay your hand upon your heart and say that you also have made preparations for a new year?"

"I am afraid, sir," stammered Trotty, looking meekly at him, "that I am a—a—little behindhand with the world."

"Behindhand with the world!" repeated Sir Joseph Bowley in a tone of terrible distinctness.

"I am afraid, sir," faltered Trotty, "that there's a matter of ten or twelve shillings owing to Mrs. Chickenstalker."

"To Mrs. Chickenstalker!" repeated Sir Joseph in the same tone as before.

"A shop, sir," exclaimed Toby, "in the general line. Also—a little money on account of rent. A very little, sir. It oughtn't to be owing, I know, but we have been hard put to it, indeed!"

Sir Joseph looked at his lady, and at Mr. Fish, and at Trotty, one after another, twice all round. He then made a despondent gesture with both hands at once, as if he gave the thing up altogether.

"How a man, even among this improvident and impracticable race; an old man; a man grown gray; can look a new year in the face, with his affairs in this condition; how he can lie down on his bed at night, and get up again in the morning, and— There!" he said, turning his back on Trotty. "Take the letter. Take the letter!"

"I heartily wish it was otherwise, sir," said Trotty, anxious to excuse himself. "We have been tried very hard."

Sir Joseph still repeating, "Take the letter, take the letter!" and Mr. Fish not only saying the same thing, but giving additional force to the request by motioning the bearer to the door, he had nothing for it but to make his bow and leave the house. And in the street poor Trotty pulled his worn old hat down on his head to hide the grief he felt at getting no hold on the new year anywhere.

He didn't even lift his hat to look up at the bell tower when he came to the old church on his return. He halted there a moment, from habit: and knew that it was growing dark, and that the steeple rose above him, indistinct and faint, in the murky air. He knew, too, that the chimes would ring immediately; and that they sounded to his fancy, at such a time, like voices in the clouds. But he only made the more haste to deliver the alderman's letter and get out of the way before they began; for he dreaded to hear them tagging "Friends and fathers, friends and fathers," to the burden they had rung out last.

Toby discharged himself of his commission, therefore, with all possible speed, and set off trotting homeward. But what with his pace, which was at best an awkward one in the street; and what with his hat, which didn't improve it; he trotted against somebody in less than no time, and was sent staggering out into the road.

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure!" said Trotty, pulling up his hat in great confusion, and between the hat and the torn lining, fixing his head into a kind of bee-hive. "I hope I haven't hurt you."

As to hurting anybody, Toby was not such an absolute Samson but that he was much more likely to be hurt himself: and indeed, he had flown out into the road like a shuttlecock. He had such an opinion of his own strength, however, that he was in real concern for the other party; and said again:

"I hope I haven't hurt you."

The man against whom he had run, a sun-browned, sinewy, country-looking man, with grizzled hair and a rough chin, stared at him for a moment as if he suspected him to be in jest. But satisfied of his good faith he answered:

"No, friend. You have not hurt me."

"Nor the child, I hope?" said Trotty.

"Nor the child," returned the man. "I thank you kindly."

As he said so he glanced at a little girl he carried in his arms, asleep: and shading her face with the long end of the poor handkerchief he wore about his throat, went slowly on.

The tone in which he said "I thank you kindly" penetrated Trotty's heart. He was so jaded and foot-sore, and so soiled with travel, and looked about him so forlorn and strange, that it was a comfort to him to be able to thank any one: no matter for how little. Toby stood gazing after him as he plodded wearily away, with the child's arm clinging round his neck.

At the figure in the worn shoes—now the very shade and ghost of shoes—rough leather leggings, common frock, and broad slouched hat, Trotty stood gazing, blind to the whole street. And at the child's arm, clinging round its neck.

Before he merged into the darkness the traveler stopped; and looking round, and seeing Trotty standing there yet, seemed undecided whether to return or go on. After doing first the one and then the other, he came back, and Trotty went half-way to meet him.

"You can tell me, perhaps," said the man with a faint smile, "and if you can I am sure you will, and I'd rather ask you than another—where Alderman Cute lives."

"Close at hand," replied Toby. "I'll show you his house with pleasure."

"I was to have gone to him elsewhere to-morrow," said the man, accompanying Toby, "but I'm uneasy under suspicion, and want to clear myself, and to be free to go and seek my bread—I don't know where. So maybe he'll forgive my going to his house to-night."

"It's impossible," cried Toby with a start, "that your name's Fern!"

"Eh!" cried the other, turning on him in astonishment.

"Fern! Will Fern!" said Trotty.

"That's my name," replied the other.

"Why, then," cried Trotty, seizing him by the arm and looking cautiously round, "for Heaven's sake don't go to him! Don't go to him! He'll put you down as sure as ever you were born. Here! come up this alley and I'll tell you what I mean. Don't go to him."

His new acquaintance looked as if he thought him mad; but he bore him company nevertheless. When they were shrouded from observation Trotty told him what he knew, and what character he had received, and all about it.

The subject of his history listened to it with a calmness that surprised him. He did not contradict or interrupt it once. He nodded his head now and then—more in corroboration of an old and worn-out story, it appeared, than in refutation of it; and once or twice threw back his hat, and passed his freckled hand over a brow where every furrow he had plowed seemed to have set its image in little. But he did no more.

"It's true enough in the main," he said, "master. I could sift grain from husk here and there, but let it be as 'tis. What odds? I have gone against his plans; to my misfortun'. I can't help it; I should do the like tomorrow. As to character, them gentlefolks will search and search, and pry and pry, and have it as free from spot or speck in us, afore they'll help us to a dry good word! Well, I hope they don't lose good opinion as easy as we do, or their lives is strict indeed, and hardly worth the keeping. For myself, master, I never took with that hand"—holding it before him—"what wasn't my own; and never held it back from work, however hard or poorly paid. Whoever can deny it, let him chop it off! But when work won't maintain me like a human creetur; when my living is so bad that I am hungry, out of doors and in; when I see a whole working life begin that way, go on that way, and end that way, without a chance or change; then I say to the gentlefolks, 'Keep away from me! Let my cottage be. My doors is dark enough without your darkening of 'em more. Don't look for me to come up into the park to help the show when there's a birthday, or a fine speechmaking, or what-not. Act your plays and games without me, and be welcome to 'em and enjoy 'em. We've nowt to do with one another. I'm best let alone!' "

Seeing that the child in his arms had opened her eyes, and was looking about her in wonder, he checked himself to say a word or two of foolish prattle in her ear, and stand her on the ground beside him. Then slowly winding one of her long tresses round and round his rough forefinger like a ring, while she hung about his dusty leg, he said to Trotty:

"I'm not a cross-grained man by natur', I believe; and easy satisfied, I am sure. I bear no ill-will against none of 'em. I only want to live like one of the Almighty's creeturs. I can't—I don't—and so there's a pit dug between me and them that can and do. There's others like me. You might tell 'em off by hundreds and by thousands sooner than by ones."

Trotty knew he spoke the truth in this, and shook his head to signify as much.

"I've got a bad name this way," said Fern; "and I'm not likely, I'm afeared, to get a better. 'Tain't lawful to be out of sorts, and I am out of sorts, though God knows I'd sooner bear a cheerful spirit if I could. Well! I don't know as this alderman could hurt me much by sending me to jail; but without a friend to speak a word for me, he might do it; and you see——" pointing downward with his finger at the child.

"She has a beautiful face," said Trotty.

"Why, yes!" replied the other in a low voice as he gently turned it up with both his hands toward his own, and looked upon it steadfastly. "I've thought so many times. I've thought so when my hearth was very cold and cupboard very bare. I thought so t'other night, when we were taken like two thieves. But they—they shouldn't try the little face too often, should they, Lilian? That's hardly fair upon a man!"

He sank his voice so low and gazed upon her with an air so stern and strange that Toby, to divert the current of his thoughts, inquired if his wife were living.

"I never had one," he returned, shaking his head. "She's my brother's child: a orphan. Nine year old, though you'd hardly think it; but she's tired and worn out now. They'd have taken care on her, the union—twenty-eight mile away from where we live—between four walls (as they took care of my old father when he couldn't work no more, though he didn't trouble 'em long); but I took her instead, and she's lived with me ever since. Her mother had a friend once in London here. We are trying to find her, and to find work too; but it's a large place. Never mind. More room for us to walk about in, Lilly!"

Meeting the child's eyes with a smile which melted Toby more than tears, he shook him by the hand.

"I don't so much as know your name," he said, "but I've opened my heart free to you, for I'm thankful to you; with good reason. I'll take your advice and keep clear of this——"

"Justice," suggested Toby.

"Ah!" he said. "If that's the name they give him. This justice. And to-morrow will try whether there's better fortun' to be met with somewheres near London. Good-night. A happy New Year!"

"Stay!" cried Trotty, catching at his hand as he relaxed his grip. "Stay! The new year never can be happy to me if we part like this. The new year never can be happy to me if I see the child and you go wandering away, you don't know where, without a shelter for your heads. Come home with me! I'm a poor man, living in a poor place; but I can give you lodging for one night and never miss it. Come home with me! Here! I'll take her!" cried Trotty, lifting up the child. "A pretty one! I'd carry twenty times her weight, and never know I'd got it. Tell me if I go too quick for you. I'm very fast. I always was!" Trotty said this, taking about six of his trotting paces to one stride of his fatigued companion; and with his thin legs quivering again beneath the load he bore.

"Why, she's as light," said Trotty, trotting in his speech as well as in his gait; for he couldn't bear to be thanked, and dreaded a moment's pause, "as light as a feather. Lighter than a peacock's feather—a great deal lighter. Here we are and here we go! Round this first turning to the right, Uncle Will, and past the pump, and sharp off up the passage to the left, right opposite the public-house. Here we are and here we go! Cross over, Uncle Will, and mind the kidney-pieman at the corner! Here we are and here we go! Down the mews here, Uncle Will, and stop at the black door, with 'T. Veck, Ticket Porter' wrote upon a board; and here we are and here we go, and here we are, indeed, my precious Meg, surprising you!"

With which words Trotty, in a breathless state, set the child down before his daughter in the middle of the floor. The little visitor looked once at Meg; and doubting nothing in that face, but trusting everything she saw there, ran into her arms.

"Here we are and here we go!" cried Trotty, running round the room and choking audibly. "Here, Uncle Will, here's a fire, you know! Why don't you come to the fire? Oh, here we are and here we go! Meg, my precious darling, where's the kettle? Here it is and here it goes, and it'll bile in no time!"

Trotty really had picked up the kettle somewhere or other in the course of his wild career, and now put it on the fire: while Meg, seating the child in a warm corner, knelt down on the ground before her, and pulled off her shoes, and dried her wet feet on a cloth. Ay, and she laughed at Trotty too—so pleasantly, so cheerfully, that

Trotty could have blessed her where she knelt for he had seen that, when they entered, she was sitting by the fire in tears.

"Why, father!" said Meg. "You're crazy to-night, I think. I don't know what the bells would say to that. Poor little feet. How cold they are!"

"Oh, they're warmer now!" exclaimed the child. "They're quite warm now!"

"No, no, no," said Meg. "We haven't rubbed 'em half enough. We're so busy. So busy! And when they're done we'll brush out the damp hair; and when that's done we'll bring some color to the poor pale face with fresh water; and when that's done we'll be so gay, and brisk, and happy!"

The child, in a burst of sobbing, clasped her round the neck; caressed her fair cheek with its hand; and said, "Oh, Meg! oh, dear Meg!"

Toby's blessing could have done no more. Who could do more?

"Why, father!" cried Meg, after a pause.

"Here I am and here I go, my dear!" said Trotty.

"Good gracious me!" cried Meg. "He's crazy! He's put the dear child's bonnet on the kettle, and hung the lid behind the door!"

"I didn't go for to do it, my love," said Trotty, hastily repairing this mistake. "Meg, my dear?"

Meg looked toward him and saw that he had elaborately stationed himself behind the chair of their male visitor, where with many mysterious gestures he was holding up the sixpence he had earned.

"I see, my dear," said Trotty, "as I was coming in, half an ounce of tea lying somewhere on the stairs; and I'm pretty sure there was a bit of bacon too. As I don't remember where it was exactly, I'll go myself and try to find 'em."

With this inscrutable artifice Toby withdrew to purchase the viands he had spoken of, for ready money, at Mrs. Chickenstalker's; and presently came back, pretending he had not been able to find them, at first, in the dark.

"But here they are at last," said Trotty, setting out the tea-things, "all correct! I was pretty sure it was tea and a rasher. So it is. Meg, my pet, if you'll just make the tea, while your unworthy father toasts the bacon, we shall be ready immediate. It's a curious circumstance," said Trotty, proceeding in his cookery, with the assistance of the toasting fork, "curious, but well known to my friends, that I never care myself for rashers nor for tea. I like to see other people enjoy 'em," said Trotty, speaking very loud, to impress the fact upon his guest, "but to me, as food, they're disagreeable."

Yet Trotty sniffed the savor of the hissing bacon—ah!—as if he liked it; and when he poured the boiling water in the tea-pot, looked lovingly down into the depths of that snug caldron, and suffered the fragrant steam to curl about his nose and wreathe his head and face in a thick cloud. However, for all this, he neither ate nor drank, except at the very beginning, a mere morsel for form's sake, which he appeared to eat with infinite relish, but declared was perfectly uninteresting to him.

No. Trotty's occupation was to see Will Fern and Lilian eat and drink; and so was Meg's. And never did spectators at a city dinner or court banquet find such high delight in seeing others feast—although it were a monarch or a pope—as those two did in looking on that night. Meg smiled at Trotty, Trotty laughed at Meg Meg shook her head, and made believe to clap her hands, applauding Trotty; Trotty conveyed, in dumb-show, unintelligible narratives of how and when and where he had found their visitors to Meg; and they were happy. Very happy.

"Although," thought Trotty sorrowfully as he watched Meg's face, "that match is broken off, I see!"

"Now, I'll tell you what," said Trotty after tea. "The little one, she sleeps with Meg, I know."

"With good Meg!" cried the child, caressing her. "With Meg."

"That's right," said Trotty. "And I shouldn't wonder if she'll kiss Meg's father, won't she? I'm Meg's father."

Mightily delighted Trotty was when the child went timidly toward him, and having kissed him, fell back upon Meg again.

"She's as sensible as Solomon," said Trotty. "Here we come and here we—no, we don't—I don't mean that—I—what was I saying, Meg, my precious?"

Meg looked toward their guest, who leaned upon her chair, and with his face turned from her, fondled the child's head, half-hidden in her lap.

"To be sure," said Toby. "To be sure! I don't know what I'm rambling on about to-night. My wits are wool-gathering, I think. Will Fern, you come along with me. You're tired to death and broken down for want of rest. You come along with me."

The man still played with the child's curls, still leaned upon Meg's chair, still turned away his face. He didn't speak, but in his rough coarse fingers, clinching and expanding in the fair hair of the child, there was an eloquence that said enough.

"Yes, yes," said Trotty, answering unconsciously what he saw expressed in his daughter's face. "Take her with you, Meg. Get her to bed. There! Now, Will, I'll show you where you lie. It's not much of a place: only a loft; but, having a loft, I always say, is one of the great conveniences of living in a mews; and till this coach-house and stable gets a better let, we live here cheap. There's plenty of sweet hay up there, belonging to a neighbor; and it's as clean as hands and Meg can make it. Cheer up! Don't give way. A new heart for a new year, always!"

The hand released from the child's hair had fallen, trembling, into Trotty's hand. So Trotty, talking without intermission, led him out as tenderly and easily as if he had been a child himself.

Returning before Meg, he listened for an instant at the door of her little chamber, an adjoining room. The child was murmuring a simple prayer before lying down to sleep; and when she had remembered Meg's name, "Dearly, dearly"—so her words ran—Trotty heard her stop and ask for his.

It was some short time before the foolish little old fellow could compose himself to mend the fire and draw his chair to the warm hearth. But when he had done so and had trimmed the light, he took his newspaper from his pocket and began to read. Carelessly at first, and skimming up and down the columns; but with an earnest and a sad attention very soon.

For this same dreaded paper redirected Trotty's thoughts into the channel they had taken all that day, and which the day's events had so marked out and shaped.

His interest in the two wanderers had set him on another course of thinking, and a happier one, for the time; but being alone again, and reading of the crimes and violences of the people, he relapsed into his former train.

In this mood he came to an account (and it was not the first he had ever read) of a woman who had laid her desperate hands not only on her own life, but on that of her young child. A crime so terrible and so revolting to his soul, dilated with the love of Meg, that he let the journal drop and fell back in his chair, appalled!

"Unnatural and cruel!" Toby cried. "Unnatural and cruel! None but people who were bad at heart, born bad, who had no business on the earth, could do such deeds. It's too true, all I've heard to-day; too just, too full of proof. We're bad!"

The chimes took up the words so suddenly—burst out so loud, and clear, and sonorous—that the bells seemed to strike him in his chair.

And what was that they said?

"Toby Veck, Toby Veck, waiting for you, Toby! Toby Veck, Toby Veck, waiting for you, Toby! Come and see us, come and see us! Drag him to us, drag him to us! Haunt and hunt him, haunt and hunt him! Break his slumbers, break his slumbers! Toby Veck, Toby Veck, door open wide, Toby, Toby Veck, Toby Veck, door open wide, Toby"—then fiercely back to their impetuous strain again, and ringing in the very bricks and plaster on the walls.

Toby listened. Fancy, fancy! His remorse for having run away from them that afternoon! No, no. Nothing of the kind. Again, again, and yet a dozen times again. "Haunt and hunt him, haunt and hunt him! Drag him to us, drag him to us!" Deafening the whole town!

"Meg," said Trotty softly, tapping at her door. "Do you hear anything?"

"I hear the bells, father. Surely they're very loud to-night."

"Is she asleep?" said Toby, making an excuse for peeping in.

"So peacefully and happily! I can't leave her yet, though, father. Look how she holds my hand!"

"Meg," whispered Trotty, "listen to the bells!"

She listened, with her face toward him all the time.

But it underwent no change. She didn't understand them.

Trotty withdrew, resumed his seat by the fire, and once more listened by himself. He remained here a little time.

It was impossible to bear it; their energy was dreadful.

"If the tower-door is really open," said Toby, hastily laying aside his apron, but never thinking of his hat, "what's to hinder me from going up into the steeple and satisfying myself? If it's shut, I don't want any other satisfaction. That's enough."

He was pretty certain as he slipped out quietly into the street that he should find it shut and locked, for he knew the door well, and had so rarely seen it open that he couldn't reckon above three times in all. It was a low arched portal, outside the church, in a dark nook behind a column; and had such great iron hinges, and such a monstrous lock, that there was more hinge and lock than door.

But what was his astonishment when, coming bareheaded to the church, and putting his hand into this dark nook, with a certain misgiving that it might be unexpectedly seized, and a shivering propensity to draw it back again, he found that the door, which opened outward, actually stood ajar!

He thought, on the first surprise, of going back, or of getting a light or a companion, but his courage aided him immediately, and he determined to ascend alone.

"What have I to fear?" said Trotty. "It's a church! Besides, the ringers may be there, and have forgotten to shut the door."

So he went in, feeling his way as he went, like a blind man; for it was very dark. And very quiet, for the chimes were silent.

The dust from the street had blown into the recess; and lying there, heaped up, made it so soft and velvetlike to the foot that there was something startling, even in that. The narrow stairs were so close to the door, too, that he stumbled at the very first; and shutting the door upon himself, by striking it with his foot, and causing it to rebound back heavily, he couldn't open it again.

This was another reason, however, for going on. Trotty groped his way and went on. Up, up, up, and round, and round; and up, up, up; higher, higher, higher up!

It was a disagreeable staircase for that groping work; so low and narrow that his groping hand was always touching something; and it often felt so like a man or ghostly figure standing up erect and making room for him to pass without discovery that he would rub the smooth wall upward searching for its face, and downward searching for its feet, while a chill tingling crept all over him. Twice or thrice a door or niche broke the monotonous surface; and then it seemed a gap as wide as the whole church; and he felt on the brink of an abyss, and going to tumble headlong down until he found the wall again.

Still up, up, up; and round, and round; and up, up, up; higher, higher, higher up!

At length, the dull and stifling atmosphere began to freshen: presently to feel quite windy: presently it blew so strong that he could hardly keep his legs. But he got to an arched window in the tower, breast-high, and, holding tight, looked down upon the house-tops, on the smoking chimneys, on the blur and blotch of lights (toward the place where Meg was wondering where he was and calling to him perhaps), all kneaded up together in a leaven of mist and darkness.

This was the belfry, where the ringers came. He had caught hold of one of the frayed ropes which hung down through apertures in the oaken roof. At first he started, thinking it was hair; then trembled at the very thought of waking the deep bell. The bells themselves were higher. Higher, Trotty, in his fascination, or in working out the spell upon him, groped his way. By ladders now, and toilsomely, for it was steep, and not too certain holding for the feet.

Up, up, up; and climb and clamber; up, up, up; higher, higher, higher up!

Until ascending through the floor and pausing with his head just raised above its beams, he came among the bells. It was barely possible to make out their great shapes in the gloom; but there they were. Shadowy, and dark, and dumb.

A heavy sense of dread and loneliness fell instantly upon him as he climbed into this airy nest of stone and metal. His head went round and round. He listened, and then raised a wild "Halloo!"

Halloo! was mournfully protracted by the echoes.

Giddy, confused, and out of breath, and frightened, Toby looked about him vacantly and sank down in a swoon.

THIRD QUARTER.

Black are the brooding clouds and troubled the deep waters, when the sea of thought, first heaving from a calm, gives up its dead. Monsters, uncouth and wild, arise in premature, imperfect resurrection; the several parts and shades of different things are joined and mixed by chance; and when, and how, and by what wonderful degrees each separates from each, and every sense and object of the mind resumes its usual form and lives again, no man—though every man is every day the casket of this type of the great mystery—can tell.

So when and how the darkness of the night-black steeple changed to shining light; when and how the solitary tower was peopled with a myriad figures; when and how the whispered "Haunt and hunt him," breathing monotonously through his sleep or swoon, became a voice exclaiming in the waking ears of Trotty, "Break his slumbers;" when and how he ceased to have a sluggish and confused idea that such things were, companioning a host of others that were not, there are no dates or means to tell. But awake and standing on his feet upon the boards where he had lately lain, he saw this goblin sight.

He saw the tower, whither his charmed footsteps had brought him, swarming with dwarf phantoms, spirits, elfin creatures of the bells. He saw them leaping, flying, dropping, pouring from the bells without a pause. He saw them, round him on the ground; above him, in the air; clambering from him, by the ropes below; looking down upon him, from the massive iron-girded beams; peeping in upon him, through the chinks and loopholes in the walls; spreading away and away from him in enlarging circles, as the water-ripples give way to a huge stone that suddenly comes splashing in among them. He saw them, of all aspects and all shapes. He saw them ugly, handsome, crippled, exquisitely formed. He saw them young, he saw them old, he saw them kind, he saw them cruel, he saw them merry, he saw them grim; he saw them dance, and heard them sing; he saw them tear their hair, and heard them howl. He saw the air thick with them. He saw them come and go incessantly. He saw them riding downward, soaring upward, sailing off afar, perching near at hand, all restless and all violently active. Stone, and brick, and slate, and tile became transparent to him as to them. He saw them in the houses busy at the sleepers' beds. He saw them soothing people in their dreams; he saw them beating them with knotted whips; he saw them yelling in their ears; he saw them playing softest music on their pillows; he saw them cheering some with the songs of birds and the perfume of flowers; he saw them flashing awful faces on the troubled rest of others from enchanted mirrors which they carried in their hands.

He saw these creatures, not only among sleeping men, but waking also, active in pursuits irreconcilable with one another, and possessing or assuming natures the most opposite. He saw one buckling on innumerable wings to increase his speed; another loading himself with chains and weights to retard his. He saw some putting the hands of clocks forward, some putting the hands of clocks backward, some endeavoring to stop the clock entirely. He saw them representing, here a marriage ceremony, there a funeral; in this chamber an election, in that a ball; he saw, everywhere, restless and untiring motion.

Bewildered by the host of shifting and extraordinary figures, as well as by the uproar of the bells, which all this while were ringing, Trotty clung to a wooden pillar for support, and turned his white face here and there in mute and stunned astonishment.

As he gazed, the chimes stopped. Instantaneous change! The whole swarm fainted! their forms collapsed, their speed deserted them; they sought to fly, but in the act of falling died and melted into air. No fresh supply succeeded them. One straggler leaped down pretty briskly from the surface of the great bell and alighted on his feet, but he was dead and gone before he could turn round. Some few of the late company who had gamboled in the tower remained there, spinning over and over a little longer; but these became at every turn more faint, and few, and feeble, and soon went the way of the rest. The last of all was one small hunchback, who had got into an echoing corner, where he twirled and twirled, and floated by himself a long time; showing such perseverance that at last he dwindled to a leg and even to a foot before he finally retired; but he vanished in the end, and then the tower was silent.

Then and not before did Trotty see in every bell a bearded figure of the bulk and stature of the bell—incomprehensibly, a figure and the bell itself. Gigantic, grave, and darkly watchful of him as he stood rooted to the ground.

Mysterious and awful figures! Resting on nothing; poised in the night air of the tower, with their draped and hooded heads merged in the dim roof; motionless and shadowy. Shadowy and dark, although he saw them by some light belonging to themselves—none else was there—each with its muffled hand upon its goblin mouth.

He could not plunge down wildly through the opening in the floor; for all power of motion had deserted him. Otherwise he would have done so—ay, would have thrown himself, headforemost, from the steeple-top rather than have seen them watching him with eyes that would have waked and watched although the pupils had been taken out.

Again, again, the dread and terror of the lonely place and of the wild and fearful night that reigned there touched him like a spectral hand. His distance from all help; the long, dark, winding, ghost-beleaguered way that lay between him and the earth on which men lived; his being high, high, high up there, where it had made him dizzy to see the birds fly in the day; cut off from all good people, who at such an hour were safe at home and sleeping in their beds; all this struck coldly through him, not as a reflection, but a bodily sensation. Meantime his eyes and thoughts and fears were fixed upon the watchful figures; which, rendered unlike any figures of this world by the deep gloom and shade enwrapping and enfolding them, as well as by their looks and forms and supernatural hovering above the floor, were nevertheless as plainly to be seen as were the stalwart oaken frames, cross-pieces, bars, and beams set up there to support the bells. These hemmed them in a very forest of hewn timber; from the entanglements, intricacies, and depths of which, as from among the boughs of a dead wood blighted for their phantom use, they kept their darksome and unwinking watch.

A blast of air—how cold and shrill!—came moaning through the tower. As it died away, the great bell, or the goblin of the great bell, spoke.

"What visitor is this?" it said. The voice was low and deep, and Trotty fancied that it sounded in the other figures as well.

"I thought my name was called by the chimes!" said Trotty, raising his hands in an attitude of supplication. "I hardly know why I am here, or how I came. I have listened to the chimes these many years. They have cheered me often."

"And you have thanked them?" said the bell.

"A thousand times!" cried Trotty.

"How?"

"I am a poor man," faltered Trotty, "and could only thank them in words."

"And always so?" inquired the goblin of the bell. "Have you never done us wrong in words?"

"No!" cried Trotty eagerly.

"Never done us foul, and false, and wicked wrong in words?" pursued the goblin of the bell.

Trotty was about to answer, "Never!" But he stopped and was confused.

"The voice of time," said the phantom, "cries to man, Advance! Time is for his advancement and improvement; for his greater worth, his greater happiness, his better life; his progress onward to that goal within its knowledge and its view, and set there, in the period when time and He began. Ages of darkness, wickedness, and violence have come and gone—millions unaccountable have suffered, lived, and died—to point the way before him. Who seeks to turn him back or stay him on his course arrests a mighty engine which will strike the meddler dead; and be the fiercer and the wilder ever for its momentary check!"

"I never did so to my knowledge, sir," said Trotty. "It was quite by accident if I did. I wouldn't go to do it, I'm sure."

"Who puts into the mouth of time or of its servants," said the goblin of the bell, "a cry of lamentation for days which have had their trial and their failure and have left deep traces of it which the blind may see—a cry that only serves the present time by showing men how much it needs their help when any ears can listen to regrets for such a past—who does this does a wrong. And you have done that wrong to us, the chimes."

Trotty's first excess of fear was gone. But he had felt tenderly and gratefully toward the bells, as you have seen; and when he heard himself arraigned as one who had offended them so weightily, his heart was touched with penitence and grief.

"If you knew," said Trotty, clasping his hands earnestly—"or perhaps you do know—if you know how often you have kept me company; how often you have cheered me up when I've been low; how you were quite the plaything of my little daughter Meg (almost the only one she ever had) when first her mother died and she and me were left alone; you won't bear malice for a hasty word!"

"Who hears in us, the chimes, one note bespeaking disregard, or stern regard, of any hope, or joy, or pain, or sorrow, of the many-sorrowed throng; who hears us make response to any creed that gauges human passions and affections, as it gauges the amount of miserable food on which humanity may pine and wither, does us wrong. That wrong you have done us!" said the bell.

"I have!" said Trotty. "Oh, forgive me!"

"Who hears us echo the dull vermin of the earth: the putters down of crushed and broken natures, formed to be raised up higher than such maggots of the time can crawl or can conceive," pursued the goblin of the bell; "who does so, does us wrong. And you have done us wrong!"

"Not meaning it," said Trottty. "In my ignorance. Not meaning it!"

"Lastly, and most of all," pursued the bell, "who turns his back upon the fallen and disfigured of his kind: abandons them as vile, and does not trace or track with pitying eyes the unfenced precipice by which they fell from good—grasping in their fall some tufts and shreds of that lost soil, and clinging to them still when bruised and dying in the gulf below, does wrong to Heaven and man, to time and to eternity. And you have done that wrong!"

"Spare me," cried Trotty, falling on his knees; "for mercy's sake!"

"Listen!" said the shadow.

"Listen!" cried the other shadows.

"Listen!" said a clear and childlike voice, which Trotty thought he recognized as having heard before.

The organ sounded faintly in the church below. Swelling by degrees, the melody ascended to the roof and filled the choir and nave. Expanding more and more, it rose up, up; up, up; higher, higher, higher up; awakening agitated hearts within the burly piles of oak, the hollow bells, the iron-bound doors, the stairs of solid stone; until the tower walls were insufficient to contain it, and it soared into the sky.

No wonder that an old man's breast could not contain a sound so vast and mighty. It broke from that weak prison in a rush of tears; and Trotty put his hands before his face.

"Listen!" said the shadow.

"Listen!" said the other shadows.

"Listen!" said the child's voice.

A solemn strain of blended voices rose into the tower.

It was a very low and mournful strain—a dirge—and as he listened Trotty heard his child among the singers.

"She is dead!" exclaimed the old man. "Meg is dead! Her spirit calls to me. I hear it!"

"The spirit of your child bewails the dead and mingles with the dead—dead hopes, dead fancies, dead imaginings of youth," returned the bell, "but she is living. Learn from her life a living truth. Learn from the creature dearest to your heart how bad the bad are born. See every bud and leaf plucked one by one from off the fairest stem, and know how bare and wretched it may be. Follow her! To desperation!"

Each of the shadowy figures stretched its right arm forth and pointed downward.

"The spirit of the chimes is your companion," said the figure. "Go! It stands behind you!"

Trotty turned and saw—the child! The child Will Fern had carried in the street; the child whom Meg had watched, but now, asleep!

"I carried her myself to-night," said Trotty. "In these arms!"

"Show him what he calls himself," said the dark figures, one and all.

The tower opened at his feet. He looked down and beheld his own form, lying at the bottom on the outside: crushed and motionless.

"No more a living man!" cried Trotty. "Dead!"

"Dead!" said the figures all together.

"Gracious Heaven! And the new year——"

"Past," said the figures.

"What!" he cried, shuddering. "I missed my way, and coming on the outside of this tower in the dark, fell down—a year ago?"

"Nine years ago," replied the figures.

As they gave the answer they recalled their outstretched hands; and where their figures had been, there the bells were.

And they rang; their time being come again. And once again vast multitudes of phantoms sprang into existence; once again were incoherently engaged, as they had been before; once again faded on the stopping of the chimes; and dwindled into nothing.

"What are these?" he asked his guide. "If I am not mad, what are these?"

"Spirits of the bells. Their sound upon the air," returned the child. "They take such shapes and occupations as the hopes and thoughts of mortals, and the recollections they have stored up, give them."

"And you," said Trotty wildly. "What are you?"

"Hush! hush!" returned the child. "Look here!"

In a poor, mean room; working at the same kind of embroidery which he had often, often seen before her; Meg, his own dear daughter, was presented to his view. He made no effort to imprint his kisses on her face; he did not strive to clasp her to his loving heart; he knew that such endearments were, for him, no more. But he held his trembling breath, and brushed away the blinding tears that he might look upon her; that he might only see her.

Ah! Changed. Changed. The light of the clear eye, how dimmed. The gloom, how faded from the cheek. Beautiful she was, as she had ever been, but hope, hope, hope, oh, where was the fresh hope that had spoken to him like a voice!

She looked up from her work at a companion. Following her eyes, the old man started back.

In the woman grown he recognized her at a glance. In the long silken hair he saw the self-same curls; around the lips, the child's expression lingering still. See! In the eyes, now turned inquiringly on Meg, there shone the very look that scanned her features when he brought her home!

Then what was this beside him?

Looking with awe into its face, he saw a something reigning there: a lofty something, undefined and indistinct, which made it hardly more than a remembrance of that child—as yonder figure might be—yet it was the same: the same: and wore the dress.

Hark! They were speaking!

"Meg," said Lilian, hesitating. "how often you raise your head from your work to look at me!"

"Are my looks so altered that they frighten you?" asked Meg.

"Nay, dear! But you smile at that yourself! Why not smile when you look at me, Meg?"

"I do so. Do I not?" she answered, smiling on her.

"Now you do," said Lilian, "but not usually. When you think I'm busy, and don't see you, you look so anxious and so doubtful that I hardly like to raise my eyes. There is little cause for smiling in this hard and toilsome life, but you were once so cheerful."

"Am I not now?" cried Meg, speaking in a tone of strange alarm and rising to embrace her. "Do I make our weary life more weary to you, Lilian?"

"You have been the only thing that made it life," said Lilian, fervently kissing her; "sometimes the only thing that made me care to live so, Meg. Such work, such work! So many hours, so many days, so many long, long nights of hopeless, cheerless, never-ending work—not to heap up riches, not to live grandly or gayly, not to live upon enough, however coarse; but to earn bare bread; to scrape together just enough to toil upon, and want upon, and keep alive in us the consciousness of our hard fate! Oh, Meg, Meg!" she raised her voice and twined her arms about her as she spoke, like one in pain. "How can the cruel world go round, and bear to look upon such lives!"

"Lilly!" said Meg, soothing her, and putting back her hair from her wet face. "Why, Lilly! You! So pretty and so young!"

"Oh, Meg!" she interrupted, holding her at arm's-length, and looking in her face imploringly. "The worst of all, the worst of all! Strike me old, Meg! Wither me, and shrivel me, and free me from the dreadful thoughts that tempt me in my youth!"

Trotty turned to look upon his guide. But the spirit of the child had taken flight. Was gone.

Neither did he himself remain in the same place; for Sir Joseph Bowley, friend and father of the poor, held a great festivity at Bowley Hall, in honor of the natal day of Lady Bowley. And as Lady Bowley had been born on New Year's Day (which the local newspapers considered an especial pointing of the finger of Providence to number one as Lady Bowley's destined figure in creation), it was on a New Year's Day that this festivity took place.

Bowley Hall was full of visitors. The red-faced gentleman was there, Mr. Filer was there, the great Alderman Cute was there—Alderman Cute had a sympathetic feeling with great people, and had considerably improved his acquaintance with Sir Joseph Bowley on the strength of his attentive letter: indeed had become quite a friend of the family since then—and many guests were there. Trotty's ghost was there, wandering about, poor phantom, drearily; and looking for its guide.

There was to be a great dinner in the great hall. At which Sir Joseph Bowley in his celebrated character of friend and father of the poor was to make his great speech. Certain plum-puddings were to be eaten by his friends and children in another hall first; and at a given signal friends and children flocking in among their friends and fathers were to form a family assemblage, with not one manly eye therein unmoistened by emotion.

But there was more than this to happen. Even more than this. Sir Jospeh Bowley, baronet and member of Parliament, was to play a match at skittles—real skittles—with his tenants!

"Which quite reminds me," said Alderman Cute, "of the days of old King Hal, stout King Hal, bluff King Hal. Ah! Fine character!"

"Very," said Mr. Filer dryly. "For marrying women and murdering 'em. Considerably more than the average number of wives, by the bye."

"You'll marry the beautiful ladies, and not murder 'em, eh?" said Alderman Cute to the heir of Bowley, aged twelve. "Sweet boy! We shall have this little gentleman in Parliament now," said the alderman, holding him by the shoulders and looking as reflective as he could, "before we know where we are. We shall hear of his successes at the poll; his speeches in the House; his overtures from governments; his brilliant achievements of all kinds; ah! we shall make our little orations about him in the Common Council, I'll be bound; before we have time to look about us!"

"Oh, the difference of shoes and stockings!" Trotty thought. But his heart yearned toward the child, for the love of those same shoeless and stockingless boys, predestined (by the alderman) to turn out bad, who might have been the children of poor Meg.

"Richard," moaned Trotty, roaming among the company to and fro; "where is he? I can't find Richard! Where is Richard?"

Not likely to be there, if still alive! But Trotty's grief and solitude confused him; and he still went wandering among the gallant company, looking for his guide, and saying, "Where is Richard? Show me Richard!"

He was wandering thus, when he encountered Mr. Fish, the confidential secretary, in great agitation.

"Bless my heart and soul!" cried Mr. Fish. "Where's Alderman Cute? Has anybody seen the alderman?"

Seen the alderman? Oh, dear! Who could ever help seeing the alderman? He was so considerate, so affable, he bore so much in mind the natural desires of folks to see him, that if he had a fault, it was the being constantly on view. And wherever the great people were, there, to be sure, attracted by the kindred sympathy between great souls, was Cute.

Several voices cried that he was in the circle round Sir Joseph. Mr. Fish made way there; found him; and took him secretly into a window near at hand. Trotty joined them. Not of his own accord. He felt that his steps were led in that direction.

"My dear Alderman Cute," said Mr. Fish, "a little more this way. The most dreadful circumstance has occurred. I have this moment received the intelligence. I think it will be best not to acquaint Sir Joseph with it till the day is over. You understand Sir Joseph, and will give me your opinion. The most frightful and deplorable event!"

"Fish!" returned the alderman. "Fish! My good fellow, what is the matter? Nothing revolutionary, I hope! No—no attempted interference with the magistrates?"

"Deedles, the banker," gasped the secretary. "Deedles Brothers—who was to have been here to-day—high in office in the Goldsmiths' Company——"

"Not stopped!" exclaimed the alderman. "It can't be!"

"Shot himself."

"Good God!"

"Put a double-barreled pistol to his mouth, in his own counting-house," said Mr. Fish, "and blew his brains out. No motive. Princely circumstances!"

"Circumstances!" exclaimed the alderman. "A man of noble fortune. One of the most respectable of men. Suicide, Mr. Fish! By his own hand!"

"This very morning," returned Mr. Fish.

"Oh, the brain, the brain!" exclaimed the pious alderman, lifting up his hands. "Oh, the nerves, the nerves, the mysteries of this machine called man! Oh, the little that unhinges it: poor creatures that we are! Perhaps a dinner, Mr. Fish. Perhaps the conduct of his son, who, I have heard, ran very wild, and was in the habit of drawing bills upon him without the least authority! A most respectable man. One of the most respectable men I ever knew! A lamentable instance, Mr. Fish. A public calamity! I shall make a point of wearing the deepest mourning. A most respectable man! But there is One above. We must submit, Mr. Fish. We must submit!"

What, alderman! No word of putting down? Remember, justice, your high moral boast and pride. Come, alderman! Balance those scales. Throw me into this, the empty one, no dinner, and nature's founts in some poor woman, dried by starving misery and rendered obdurate to claims for which her offspring has authority in holy Mother Eve. Weigh me the two, you Daniel, going to judgment, when your day shall come! Weigh them in the eyes of suffering thousands, audience (not unmindful) of the grim farce you play. Or supposing that you straved from your five wits—it's not so far to go but that it might be—and laid hands upon that throat of yours, warning your fellows (if you have a fellow) how they croak their comfortable wickedness to raving heads and stricken hearts What then?

The words rose up in Trotty's breast as if they had been spoken by some other voice within him. Alderman Cute pledged himself to Mr. Fish that he would assist him in breaking the melancholy catastrophe to Sir Joseph when the day was over. Then, before they parted. wringing Mr. Fish's hand in bitterness of soul, he said, "The most respectable of men!" And added that he hardly knew (not even he) why such afflictions were allowed on earth.

"It's almost enough to make one think, if one didn't know better," said Alderman Cute, "that at times some motion of a capsizing nature was going on in things, which affected the general economy of the social fabric. Deedles Brothers!"

The skittle-playing came off with immense success. Sir Joseph knocked the pins about quite skillfully; Master Bowley took an innings at a shorter distance also; and everybody said that now, when a baronet and the son of a baronet played at skittles, the country was coming round again as fast as it could come.

At its proper time the banquet was served up. Trotty involuntarily repaired to the hall with the rest, for he felt himself conducted thither by some stronger impulse than his own free will. The sight was gay in the extreme; the ladies were very handsome; the visitors delighted, cheerful, and good-tempered. When the lower doors were opened and the people flocked in in their rustic dresses the beauty of the spectacle was at its height; but Trotty only murmured more and more: "Where is Richard? He should help and comfort her! I can't see Richard!"

There had been some speeches made; and Lady Bowley's health had been proposed; and Sir Joseph Bowley had returned thanks, and had made his great speech, showing by various pieces of evidence that he was the born friend and father, and so forth; and had given as a toast his friends and children, and the dignity of labor; when a slight disturbance at the bottom of the hall attracted Toby's notice. After some confusion, noise, and opposition one man broke through the rest, and stood forward by himself.

Not Richard. No. But one whom he had thought of, and had looked for many times. In a scantier supply of light he might have doubted the identity of that worn man, so old, and gray, and bent; but with a blaze of lamps upon his gnarled and knotted head, he knew Will Fern as soon as he stepped forth.

"What is this!" exclaimed Sir Joseph, rising. "Who gave this man admittance? This is a criminal from prison! Mr. Fish, sir, will you have the goodness——"

"A minute!" said Will Fern. "A minute! My lady, you was born on this day along with a new year. Get me a minute's leave to speak."

She made some intercession for him. Sir Joseph took his seat again, with native dignity.

The ragged visitor—for he was miserably dressed—looked round upon the company, and made his homage to them with an humble bow.

"Gentlefolks!" he said, "you've drunk the laborer. Look at me!"

"Just come from jail," said Mr. Fish.

"Just come from jail," said Will. "And neither for the first time, nor the second, nor the third, nor yet the fourth."

Mr. Filer was heard to remark testily that four times was over the average; and he ought to be ashamed of himself.

"Gentlefolks!" repeated Will Fern, "look at me! You see I'm at the worst. Beyond all hurt or harm; beyond your help; for the time when your kind words or kind actions could have done me good"—he struck his hand upon his breast, and shook his head—"is gone with the scent of last year's beans or clover on the air. Let me say a word for these," pointing to the laboring people in the hall; "and when you're met together, hear the real truth spoke out for once."

"There's not a man here," said the host, "who would have him for a spokesman."

"Like enough, Sir Joseph. I believe it. Not the less true, perhaps, is what I say. Perhaps that's a proof on it. Gentlefolks, I've lived many a year in this place. You may see the cottage from the sunk fence over yonder. I've seen the ladies draw it in their books a hundred times. It looks well in a picter, I've heerd say; but there ain't weather in picters, and maybe 'tis fitter for that than for a place to live in. Well! I lived there. How hard—how bitter hard I lived there, I won't say. Any day in the year, and every day, you can judge for your own selves."

He spoke as he had spoken on the night when Trotty found him in the street. His voice was deeper and more husky, and had a trembling in it now and then; but he never raised it passionately, and seldom lifted it above the firm stern level of the homely facts he stated.

"'Tis harder than you think for, gentlefolks, to grow up decent, commonly decent, in such a place. That I growed up a man and not a brute says something for me—as I was then. As I am now, there's nothing can be said for me or done for me. I'm past it."

"I am glad this man has entered," observed Sir Joseph, looking round serenely. "Don't disturb him. It appears to be ordained. He is an example: a living example. I hope and trust and confidently expect that it will not be lost upon my friends here."

"I dragged on," said Fern after a moment's silence, "somehow. Neither me nor any other man knows how; but so heavy that I couldn't put a cheerful face upon it, or make believe that I was anythng but what I was. Now, gentlemen—you gentlemen that sits at sessions—when you see a man with discontent writ on his face, you says to one another, 'He's suspicious. I has my doubts,' says you, 'about Will Fern. Watch that fellow!' I don't say, gentlemen, it ain't quite nat'ral, but I say 'tis so; and from that hour whatever Will Fern does or lets alone—all one—it goes against him."

Alderman Cute stuck his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, and leaning back in his chair, and smiling, winked at a neighboring chandelier. As much as to say, "Of course! I told you so. The common cry! Lord bless you, we are up to all this sort of thing—myself and human nature."

"Now, gentlemen," said Will Fern, holding out his hands, and flashing for an instant in his haggard face, "see how your laws are made to trap and hunt us when we're brought to this I tries to live elsewhere. And I'm a vagabond. To jail with him! I comes back here. I goes a-nutting in your woods, and breaks—who don't?—

a limber branch or two. To jail with him! One of your keepers sees me in the broad day, near my own patch of garden, with a gun. To jail with him! I has a nat'ral angry word with that man when I'm free again. To jail with him! I cuts a stick. To jail with him! I eats a rotten apple or a turnip. To jail with him! It's twenty miles away; and coming back I begs a trifle on the road. To jail with him! At last the constable, the keeper—anybody—finds me anywhere, a-doing anything. To jail with him, for he's a vagrant, and a jail-bird known; and jail's the only home he's got."

The alderman nodded sagaciously, as who should say, "A very good home too!"

"Do I say this to serve my cause?" cried Fern. "Who can give me back my liberty, who can give me back my good name, who can give me back my innocent niece? Not all the lords and ladies in wide England. But, gentlemen, gentlemen, dealing with other men like me, begin at the right end. Give us, in mercy, better homes when we're a lying in our cradles; give us better food when we're a-working for our lives; give us kinder laws to bring us back when we're a-going wrong; and don't set jail, jail, jail afore us everywhere we turn. There ain't a condescension you can show the laborer then that he won't take as ready and as grateful as a man can be; for he has a patient, peaceful, willing heart. But you must put his rightful spirit in him first; for whether he's a wreck and ruin such as me, or is like one of them that stand here now, his spirit is divided from you at this time. Bring it back, gentlefolks, bring it back! Bring it back afore the day comes when even his Bible changes in his altered mind, and the words seem to him to read as they have sometimes read in my own eyes—in jail: 'Whither thou goest, I cannot go; where thou lodgest, I do not lodge; thy people are not my people; nor thy God my God!' "

A sudden stir and agitation took place in the hall. Trotty thought at first that several had risen to eject the man; and hence this change in its appearance. But another moment showed him that the room and all the company had vanished from his sight, and that his daughter was again before him, seated at her work. But in a poorer, meaner garret than before; and with no Lilian by her side.

The frame at which she had worked was put away upon a shelf and covered up. The chair in which she had sat was turned against the wall. A history was written in these little things and in Meg's grief-worn face. Oh! who could fail to read it!

Meg strained her eyes upon her work until it was too dark to see the threads; and when the night closed in she lighted her feeble candle and worked on. Still her old father was invisible about her; looking down upon her; loving her—how dearly loving her!—and talking to her in a tender voice about the old times and the bells. Though he knew, poor Trotty, though he knew she could not hear him.

A great part of the evening had worn away when a knock came at her door. She opened it. A man was on the threshold. A slouching, moody, drunken sloven, wasted by intemperance and vice, and with his matted hair and unshorn beard in wild disorder; but with some traces on him, too, of having been a man of good proportion and good features in his youth.

He stopped until he had her leave to enter; and she, retiring a pace or two from the open door, silently and sorrowfully looked upon him. Trotty had his wish. He saw Richard.

"May I come in, Margaret?"

"Yes! Come in! Come in!"

It was well that Trotty knew him before he spoke; for with any doubt remaining on his mind the harsh discordant voice would have persuaded him that it was not Richard, but some other man.

There were but two chairs in the room. She gave him hers, and stood at some short distance from him, waiting to hear what he had to say.

He sat, however, staring vacantly at the floor with a lusterless and stupid smile. A spectacle of such deep degradation, of such abject hopelessnesss, of such a miserable downfall that she put her hands before her face and turned away lest he should see how much it moved her.

Roused by the rustling of her dress, or some such trifling sound, he lifted his head and began to speak as if there had been no pause since he entered.

"Still at work, Margaret? You work late."

"I generally do."

"And early?"

"And early."

"So she said. She said you never tired; or never owned that you tired. Not all the time you lived together. Not even when you fainted, between work and fasting. But I told you that the last time I came."

"You did," she answered. "And I implored you to tell me nothing more; and you made me a solemn promise, Richard, that you never would."

"A solemn promise," he repeated with a driveling laugh and vacant stare. "A solemn promise. To be sure. A solemn promise!" Awakening, as it were, after a time, in the same manner as before, he said with sudden animation:

"How can I help it, Margaret! What am I to do? She has been to me again!"

"Again!" cried Meg, clasping her hands. "Oh, does she think of me so often? Has she been again?"

"Twenty times again," said Richard. "Margaret, she haunts me. She comes behind me in the street, and thrusts it in my hand. I hear her foot upon the ashes when I'm at my work (ha! ha! that ain't often), and before I can turn my head, her voice is in my ear, saying, 'Richard, don't look round. For Heaven's love, give her this!' She brings it where I live; she sends it in letters, she taps at the window and lays it on the sill. What can I do? Look at it!"

He held out in his hand a little purse, and chinked the money it inclosed.

"Hide it," said Meg. "Hide it! When she comes again tell her, Richard, that I love her in my soul. That I never lie down to sleep but I bless her and pray for her. That in my solitary work I never cease to have her in my thoughts. That she is with me night and day. That if I died to-morrow, I would remember her with my last breath. But that I cannot look upon it!"

He slowly recalled his hand, and crushing the purse together said with a kind of drowsy thoughtfulness:

"I told her so. I told her so, as plain as words could speak. I've taken this gift back and left it at her door a dozen times since then. But when she came at last and stood before me face to face what could I do?"

"You saw her!" exclaimed Meg. "You saw her! Oh, Lilian, my sweet girl! Oh, Lilian, Lilian!"

"I saw her," he went on to say, not answering, but engaged in the same slow pursuit of his own thoughts. "There she stood trembling! 'How does she look, Richard? Does she ever speak of me? Is she thinner? My old place at the table: what's in my old place? And the frame she taught me our old work on—has she burned it, Richard?' There she was. I heard her say it."

Meg checked her sobs, and with the tears streaming from her eyes bent over him to listen. Not to lose a breath.

With his arms resting on his knees, and stooping forward in his chair as if what he said were written on the ground in some half-legible character, which it was his occupation to decipher and connect, he went on:

"'Richard, I have fallen very low; and you may guess how much I have suffered in having this sent back when I can bear to bring it in my hand to you. But you loved her once, even, in my memory, dearly. Others stepped in between you; fears, and jealousies, and doubts, and vanities estranged you from her; but you did love her, even in my memory!' I suppose I did," he said, interrupting himself for a moment. "I did! That's neither here nor there. 'Oh, Richard, if you ever did; if you have any memory for what is gone and lost, take it to her once more. Once more! Tell her how I laid my head upon your shoulder, where her own head might have lain, and was so humble to you, Richard. Tell her that you looked into my face and saw the beauty which she used to praise, all gone; all gone; and in its place a poor, wan, hollow cheek that she would weep to see. Tell her everything, and take it back, and she will not refuse again. She will not have the heart!"

So he sat musing and repeating the last words until he woke again, and rose.

"You won't take it, Margaret?"

She shook her head and motioned an entreaty to him to leave her.

"Good-night, Margaret."

"Good-night!"

He turned to look upon her; struck by her sorrow and perhaps by the pity for himself which trembled in her voice. It was a quick and rapid action; and for the moment some flash of his old bearing kindled in his form.

In the next he went as he had come. Nor did this glimmer of a quenched fire seem to light him to a quicker sense of his debasement. In any mood, in any grief, in any torture of the mind or body Meg's work must be done. She sat down to her task and plied it. Night, midnight. Still she worked.

She had a meager fire, the night being very cold; and rose at intervals to mend it. The chimes rang half-past twelve while she was thus engaged; and when they ceased she heard a gentle knocking at the door. Before she could so much as wonder who was there at that unusual hour it opened.

O youth and beauty, happy as ye should be, look at this. O youth and beauty, blessed and blessing all within your reach, and working out the ends of your beneficent Creator, look at this!

She saw the entering figure; screamed its name; cried "Lilian!"

It was swift, and fell upon its knees before her; clinging to her dress.

"Up, dear! Up! Lilian! My own dearest!"

"Nevermore, Meg; nevermore! Here! Here! Close to you, holding to you, feeling your dear breath upon my face!"

"Sweet Lilian! Darling Lilian! Child of my heart—no mother's love can be more tender—lay your head upon my breast!"

"Nevermore, Meg. Nevermore! When I first looked into your face you knelt before me. On my knees before you let me die. Let it be here!"

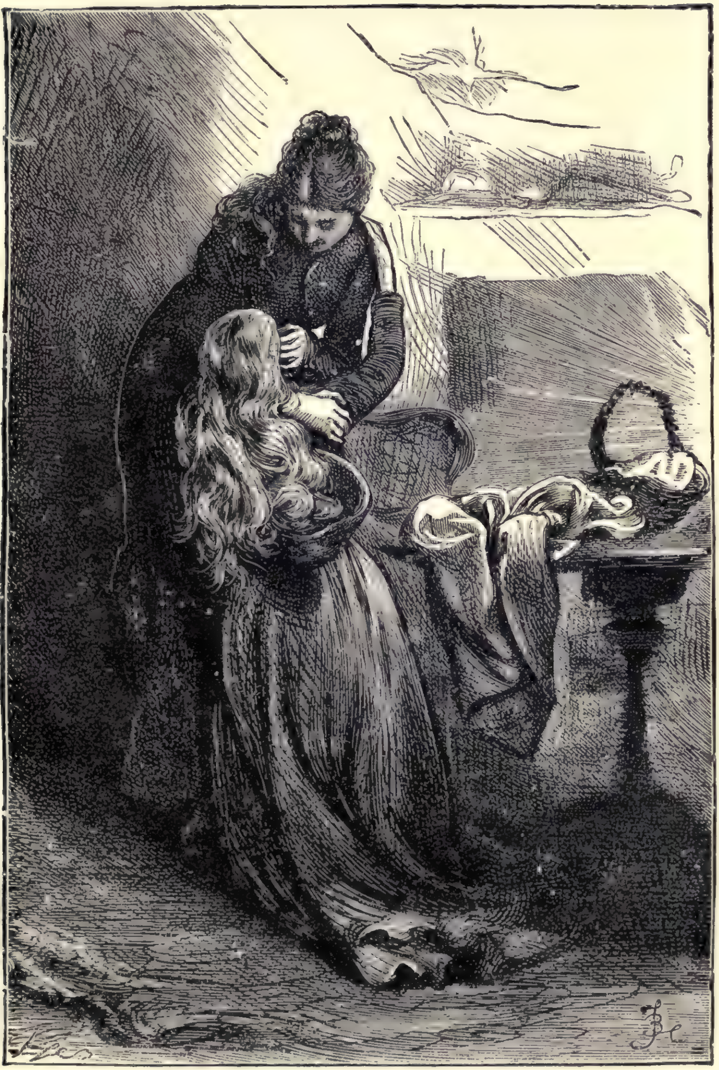
"You have come back. My treasure! We will live together, work together, hope together, die together!"

"Ah! Kiss my lips, Meg; fold your arms about me; press me to your bosom; look kindly on me, but don't raise me. Let it be here. Let me see the last of your dear face upon my knees!"

O youth and beauty, happy as ye should be, look at this! O youth and beauty, working out the ends of your beneficent Creator, look at this!

"Forgive me, Meg! So dear, so dear! Forgive me! I know you do, I see you do, but say so, Meg!"

She said so with her lips on Lilian's cheek. And with her arms twined round—she knew it now—a broken heart.



" HERE! HERE! CLOSE TO YOU, . . . FEELING YOUR DEAR BREATH UPON MY FACE."

C.S.

"His blessing on you, dearest love. Kiss me once more! He suffered her to sit beside his feet, and dry them with her hair. Oh, Meg, what mercy and compassion!"

As she died, the spirit of the child returning, innocent and radiant, touched the old man with its hand and beckoned him away.

FOURTH QUARTER.

Some new remembrance of the ghostly figures in the bell; some faint impression of the ringing of the chimes; some giddy consciousness of having seen the swarm of phantoms reproduced and reproduced until the recollection of them lost itself in the confusion of their numbers; some hurried knowledge, how conveyed to him he knew not, that more years had passed; and Trotty, with the spirit of the child attending him, stood looking on at mortal company.

Fat company, rosy-cheeked company, comfortable company. They were but two, but they were red enough for ten. They sat before a bright fire, with a small low table beween them; and unless the fragrance of hot tea and muffins lingered longer in that room than in most others, the table had seen service very lately. But all the cups and saucers being clean and in their proper places in the corner cupboard; and the brass toasting-fork hanging in its usual nook and spreading its four idle fingers out as if it wanted to be measured for a glove; there remained no other visible tokens of the meal just finished than such as purred and washed their whiskers in the person of the basking cat and glistened in the gracious, not to say the greasy, faces of her patrons.

This cozy couple (married evidently) had made a fair division of the fire between them, and sat looking at the glowing sparks that dropped into the grate; now nodding off into a doze; now waking up again when some hot fragment larger than the rest came rattling down as if the fire were coming with it.

It was in no danger of sudden extinction, however; for it gleamed not only in the little room, and on the panes of window-glass in the door, and on the curtain half-drawn across them, but in the little shop beyond. A little shop, quite crammed and choked with the abundance of its stock, a perfectly voracious little shop, with a maw as accommodating and full as any shark's. Cheese, butter, firewood, soap, pickles, matches, bacon, table-beer, peg-tops, sweetmeats, boys' kites, bird-seed, cold ham, birch brooms, hearth-stones, salt, vinegar, blacking, red herrings, stationery, lard, mushroom-ketchup, staylaces, loaves of bread, shuttlecocks, eggs, and slate-pencils; everything was fish that came to the net of this greedy little shop, and all articles were in its net. How many other kinds of petty merchandise were there it would be difficult to say; but balls of packthread, ropes of onions, pounds of candles, cabbage-nets, and brushes hung in bunches from the ceiling like extraordinary fruit; while various odd canisters emitting aromatic smells fully established the veracity of the inscription over the outer door, which informed the public that the keeper of this little shop was a licensed dealer in tea, coffee, tobacco, pepper, and snuff.

Glancing at such of these articles as were visible in the shining of the blaze, and the less cheerful radiance of two smoky lamps which burned but dimly in the shop itself, as though its plethora sat heavy on their lungs; and glancing, then, at one of the two faces by the parlor fire; Trotty had small difficulty in recognizing in the stout old lady Mrs. Chickenstalker; always inclined to corpulency, even in the days when he had known her as established in the general line, and having a small balance against him in her books.

The features of her companion were less easy to him. The great broad chin, with creases in it large enough to hide a finger in; the astonished eyes, that seemed to expostulate with themselves for sinking deeper and deeper into the yielding fat of the soft face; the nose afflicted with that disordered action of its functions which is generally termed the snuffles; the short thick throat and laboring chest, with other beauties of the like description, though calculated to impress the memory, Trotty could at first allot to nobody he had ever known: and yet he had some recollection of them too. At length, in Mrs. Chickenstalker's partner in the general line, and in the crooked and eccentric line of life, he recognized the former porter of Sir Joseph Bowley; an apoplectic innocent, who had connected himself in Trotty's mind with Mrs. Chickenstalker years ago by giving him admission to the mansion where he had confessed his obligations to that lady, and drawn on his unlucky head such grave reproach.

Trotty had little interest in a change like this, after the changes he had seen; but association is very strong sometimes; and he looked involuntarily behind the parlor door, where the accounts of credit customers were usually kept in chalk. There was no record of his name. Some names were there, but they were strange to him, and infinitely fewer than of old; from which he argued that the porter was an advocate of ready-money transactions, and on coming into the business had looked pretty sharp after the Chickenstalker defaulters.

So desolate was Trotty and so mournful for the youth and promise of his blighted child that it was a sorrow to him even to have no place in Mrs. Chickenstalker's ledger.

"What sort of a night is it, Anne?" inquired the former porter of Sir Joseph Bowley, stretching out his legs before the fire, and rubbing as much of them as his short arms could reach; with an air that added, "Here I am if it's bad, and I don't want to go out if it's good."

"Blowing and sleeting hard," returned his wife, "and threatening snow. Dark. And very cold."

"I am glad to think we had muffins," said the former porter in the tone of one who had set his conscience at rest. "It's a sort of night that's meant for muffins. Likewise crumpets. Also Sally Lunns."

The former porter mentioned each successive kind of eatable as if he were musingly summing up his good actions. After which he rubbed his fat legs as before, and jerking them at the knees to get the fire upon the yet unroasted parts, laughed as if somebody had tickled him.

"You're in spirits, Tugby, my dear," observed his wife.

The firm was Tugby, late Chickenstalker.

"No," said Tugby. "No. Not particular. I'm a little elewated. The muffins came so pat!"

With that he chuckled until he was black in the face; and had so much ado to become any other color that his fat legs took the strangest excursions into the air. Nor were they reduced to anything like decorum until Mrs. Tugby had thumped him violently on the back and shaken him as if he were a great bottle.

"Good gracious, goodness, lord-a-mercy bless and save the man!" cried Mrs. Tugby in great terror. "What's he doing?"

Mr. Tugby wiped his eyes and faintly repeated that he found himself a little elewated.

"Then don't be so again, that's a dear good soul," said Mrs. Tugby, "if you don't want to frighten me to death, with your struggling and fighting!"

Mr. Tugby said he wouldn't; but his whole existence was a fight, in which, if any judgment might be founded on the constantly increasing shortness of his breath and the deepening purple of his face, he was always getting the worst of it.

"So it's blowing, and sleeting, and threatening snow; and it's dark, and very cold, is it, my dear?" said Mr. Tugby, looking at the fire and reverting to the cream and marrow of his temporary elevation.

"Hard weather indeed," returned his wife, shaking her head.

"Ay! ay! Years," said Mr. Tugby, "are like Christians in that respect. Some of 'em die hard; some of 'em die easy. This one hasn't many days to run, and is making a fight for it. I like him all the better. There's a customer, my love!"

Attentive to the rattling door, Mrs. Tugby had already risen.

"Now then!" said that lady, passing out into the little shop. "What's wanted? Oh! I beg your pardon, sir, I'm sure. I didn't think it was you."

She made this apology to a gentleman in black, who, with his wristbands tucked up, and his hat cocked loungingly on one side, and his hands in his pockets, sat down astride on the table-beer barrel, and nodded in return.

"This is a bad business upstairs, Mrs. Tugby," said the gentleman. "The man can't live."

"Not the back attic can't!" cried Tugby, coming out into the shop to join the conference.

"The back attic, Mr. Tugby," said the gentleman, "is coming downstairs fast, and will be below the basement very soon."

Looking by turns at Tugby and his wife, he sounded the barrel with his knuckles for the depth of beer, and having found it, played a tune upon the empty part.

"The back attic, Mr. Tugby," said the gentleman, Tubgy having stood in silent consternation for some time, "is going."

"Then," said Tugby, turning to his wife, "he must go, you know, before he's gone."

"I don't think you can move him," said the gentleman, shaking his head. "I wouldn't take the responsibility of saying it could be done, myself. You had better leave him where he is. He can't live long."

"It's the only subject," said Tugby, bringing the butter-scale down upon the counter with a crash by weighing his fist on it, "that we've ever had a word upon, she and me, and look what it comes to! He's going to die here after all. Going to die upon the premises. Going to die in our house!"

"And where should he have died, Tugby?" cried his wife.

"In the workhouse," he returned. "What are workhouses made for?"

"Not for that," said Mrs. Tugby with great energy. "Not for that! Neither did I marry you for that. Don't think it, Tugby. I won't have it. I won't allow it. I'd be separated first, and never see your face again. When my widow's name stood over that door as it did for many years—this house being known as Mrs. Chickenstalker's far and wide, and never known but to its honest credit and its good report—when my widow's name stood over that door, Tugby, I knew him as a handsome, steady, manly, independent youth; I knew her as the sweetest-looking, sweetest tempered girl eyes ever saw; I knew her father (poor old creetur, he fell down from the steeple walking in his sleep, and killed himself) for the simplest, hardest-working, childest-hearted man that ever drew the breath of life; and when I turn them out of house and home may angels turn me out of heaven. As they would! And serve me right!"

Her old face, which had been a plump and dimpled one before the changes which had come to pass, seemed to shine out of her as she said these words; and when she dried her eyes and shook her head and her handkerchief at Tugby with an expression of firmness which it was quite clear was not to be easily resisted, Trotty said, "Bless her! Bless her!"

Then he listened with a panting heart for what should follow. Knowing nothing yet but that they spoke of Meg.

If Tugby had been a little elevated in the parlor he more than balanced that account by being not a little depressed in the shop, where he now stood staring at his wife without attempting a reply; secretly conveying, however—either in a fit of abstraction or as a precautionary measure—all the money from the till into his own pockets as he looked at her.

The gentleman upon the table-beer cask, who appeared to be some authorized medical attendant upon the poor, was far too well accustomed evidently to little differences of opinion between man and wife to interpose any remark in this instance. He sat softly whistling and turning little drops of beer out of the tap upon the ground, until there was a perfect calm, when he raised his head and said to Mrs. Tugby, late Chickenstalker:

"There's something interesting about the woman, even now. How did she come to marry him?"

"Why, that," said Mrs. Tugby, taking a seat near him, "is not the least cruel part of her story, sir. You see, they kept company, she and Richard, many years ago. When they were a young and beautiful couple everything was settled, and they were to have been married on a New Year's Day. But somehow Richard got it into his head, through what the gentlemen told him, that he might do better, and that he'd soon repent it, and that she wasn't good enough for him, and that a young man of spirit had no business to be married. And the gentlemen frightened her, and made her melancholy, and timid of his deserting her, and of her children coming to the gallows, and of its being wicked to be man and wife, and a good deal more of it. And in short, they lingered and lingered, and their trust in one another was broken, and so at last was the match. But the fault was his. She would have married him, sir, joyfully. I've seen her heart swell many times afterward when he passed her in a proud and careless way; and never did a woman grieve more truly for a man than she for Richard when he first went wrong."

"Oh! he went wrong, did he?" said the gentleman, pulling out the vent-peg of the table beer and trying to peep down into the barrel through the hole.

"Well, sir, I don't know that he rightly understood himself, you see. I think his mind was troubled by their having broke with one another; and that but for being ashamed before the gentlemen, and perhaps for being uncertain, too, how she might take it, he'd have gone through any suffering or trial to have had Meg's promise and Meg's hand again. That's my belief. He never said so; more's the pity! He took to drinking, idling, bad companions: all the fine resources that were to be so much better for him than the home he might have had. He lost his looks, his character, his health, his strength, his friends, his work: everything!"

"He didn't lose everything, Mrs. Tugby," returned the gentleman, "because he gained a wife; and I want to know how he gained her."

"I'm coming to it, sir, in a moment. This went on for years and years; he sinking lower and lower; she enduring, poor thing, miseries enough to wear her life away. At last he was so cast down and cast out that no one would employ or notice him; and doors were shut upon him, go where he would. Applying from place to place and door to door, and coming for the hundredth time to one gentleman who had often and often tried him (he was a good workman to the very end), that gentleman, who knew his history, said, 'I believe you are incorrigible; there is only one person in the world who has a chance of reclaiming you; ask me to trust you no more until she tries to do it.' Something like that in his anger and vexation."

"Ah!" said the gentleman. "Well?"

"Well, sir, he went to her and knelt to her; said it was so; said it ever had been so; and made a prayer to her to save him."

"And she? Don't distress yourself, Mrs. Tugby."

"She came to me that night to ask me about living here. 'What he was once to me,' she said, 'is buried in a grave, side by side with what I was to him. But I have thought of this, and I will make the trial. In the hope of saving him; for the love of the light-hearted girl (you remember her) who was to have been married on a New

Year's Day; and for the love of her Richard.' And she said he had come to her from Lilian, and Lilian had trusted to him, and she never could forget that. So they were married; and when they came home here and I saw them, I hoped that such prophecies as parted them when they were young may not often fulfill themselves as they did in this case, or I wouldn't be the maker of them for a mine of gold."

The gentleman got off the cask and stretched himself, observing:

"I suppose he used her ill as soon as they were married?"

"I don't think he ever did that," said Mrs. Tugby, shaking her head and wiping her eyes. "He went on better for a short time; but his habits were too old and strong to be got rid of; he soon fell back a little; and was falling fast back when his illness came so strong upon him. I think he has always felt for her. I am sure he has. I have seen him in his crying fits and tremblings try to kiss her hand; and I have heard him call her 'Meg,' and say it was her nineteenth birthday. There he has been lying now these weeks and months. Between him and her baby she has not been able to do her old work; and by not being able to be regular she has lost it, even if she could have done it. How they have lived, I hardly know!"

"I know," muttered Mr. Tugby, looking at the till and round the shop and at his wife; and rolling his head with immense intelligence. "Like fighting-cocks!"

He was interrupted by a cry—a sound of lamentation—from the upper story of the house. The gentleman moved hurriedly to the door.

"My friend," he said, looking back, "you needn't discuss whether he shall be removed or not. He has spared you that trouble, I believe."

Saying so he ran upstairs, followed by Mrs. Tugby; while Mr. Tugby panted and grumbled after them at leisure, being rendered more than commonly short-winded by the weight of the till, in which there had been an inconvenient quantity of copper. Trotty, with the child beside him, floated up the staircase like mere air.

"Follow her! Follow her! Follow her!" He heard the ghostly voices in the bells repeat their words as he ascended "Learn it from the creature dearest to your heart!"

It was over. It was over. And this was she, her father's pride and joy! This haggard, wretched woman, weeping by the bed, if it deserved that name, and pressing to her breast and hanging down her head upon an infant. Who can tell how spare, how sickly, and how poor an infant! Who can tell how dear!

"Thank God!" cried Trotty, holding up his folded hands. "Oh, God be thanked! She loves her child!"

The gentleman, not otherwise hard-hearted or indifferent to such scenes than that he saw them every day and knew that they were figures of no moment in the Filer sums—mere scratches in the working of these calcuations—laid his hand upon the heart that beat no more, and listened for the breath and said, "His pain is over. It's better as it is!" Mrs. Tugby tried to comfort her with kindness. Mr. Tugby tried philosophy.

"Come! come!" he said with his hands in his pockets, "you mustn't give way, you know. That won't do. You must fight up. What would have become of me if I had given way when I was a porter, and we had as many as six runaway carriage-doubles at our door in one night! But I fell back upon my strength of mind, and didn't open it!"

Again Trotty heard the voices, saying, "Follow her!" He turned toward his guide and saw it rising from him, passing through the air. "Follow her!" it said. And vanished.

He hovered around her; sat down at her feet; looked up into her face for one trace of her old self; listened for one note of her old pleasant voice. He flitted round the child: so wan, so prematurely old, so dreadful in its gravity, so plaintive in its feeble, mournful, miserable wail. He almost worshiped it. He clung to it as her only safeguard; as the last unbroken link that bound her to endurance. He set his father's hope and trust on the frail baby; watched her every look upon it as she held it in her arms; and cried a thousand times, "She loves it! God be thanked, she loves it!"

He saw the woman tend her in the night; return to her when her grudging husband was asleep and all was still; encourage her, shed tears with her, set nourishment before her. He saw the day come, and the night again;

the day, the night; the time go by; the house of death relieved of death; the room left to herself and to the child; he heard it moan and cry; he saw it harass her, and tire her out, and when she slumbered in exhaustion, drag her back to consciousness, and hold her with its little hands upon the rack; but she was constant to it, gentle with it, patient with it. Patient! Was its loving mother in her inmost heart and soul, and had its being knitted up with hers as when she carried it unborn.

All this time she was in want: languishing away in dire and pining want. With the baby in her arms she wandered here and there in quest of occupation; and with its thin face lying in her lap and looking up in hers, did any work for any wretched sum; a day and night of labor for as many farthings as there were figures on the dial. If she had quarreled with it; if she had neglected it; if she had looked upon it with a moment's hate; if, in the frenzy of an instant, she had struck it! No. His comfort was she loved it always.

She told no one of her extremity, and wandered abroad in the day lest she should be questioned by her only friend: for any help she received from her hands occasioned fresh disputes between the good woman and her husband; and it was new bitterness to be the daily cause of strife and discord where she owed so much.

She loved it still. She loved it more and more. But a change fell on the aspect of her love one night.

She was singing faintly to it in its sleep, and walking to and fro to hush it, when her door was softly opened and a man looked in.

"For the last time," he said.

"William Fern!"

"For the last time."

He listened like a man pursued and spoke in whispers.

"Margaret, my race is nearly run. I couldn't finish it without a parting word with you. Without one grateful word."

"What have you done?" she asked, regarding him with terror.

He looked at her, but gave no answer.

After a short silence he made a gesture with his hand as if he set her question by; as if he brushed it aside; and said:

"It's long ago, Margaret, now; but that night is as fresh in my memory as ever 'twas. We little thought then," he added, looking round, "that we should ever meet like this. Your child, Margaret. Let me have it in my arms. Let me hold your child."

He put his hat upon the floor and took it. And he trembled as he took it from head to foot.

"Is it a girl?"

"Yes."

He put his hand before its little face.

"See how weak I'm grown, Margaret, when I want the courage to look at it! Let her be a moment. I won't hurt her. It's long ago, but—what's her name?"

"Margaret," she answered quickly.

"I'm glad of that," he said. "I'm glad of that!"

He seemed to breathe more freely; and after pausing for an instant took away his hand and looked upon the infant's face. But covered it again immediately.

"Margaret!" he said, and gave her back the child. "It's Lilian's."

"Lilian's!"

"I held the same face in myarms when Lilian's mother died and left her."

"When Lilian's mother died and left her!" she repeated wildly.

"How shrill you speak! Why do you fix your eyes upon me so, Margaret?"

She sank down in a chair and pressed the infant to her breast and wept over it. Sometimes she released it from her embrace to look anxiously in its face: then strained it to her bosom again. At those times, when she gazed upon it, then it was that something fierce and terrible began to mingle with her love. Then it was that her old father quailed.

"Follow her!" was sounded through the house. "Learn it from the creature dearest to your heart!"

"Margaret," said Fern, bending over her and kissing her upon the brow, "I thank you for the last time. Good-night. Good-by! Put your hand in mine and tell me you'll forget me from this hour, and try to think the end of me was here."

"What have you done?" she asked again.

"There'll be a fire to-night," he said, removing from her. "There'll be fires this winter-time to light the dark nights east, west, north, and south. When you see the distant sky red they'll be blazing. When you see the distant sky red think of me no more; or, if you do, remember what a hell was lighted up inside of me, and think you see its flames reflected in the clouds. Good-night. Good-by!"

She called to him; but he was gone. She sat down stupefied until her infant roused her to a sense of hunger, cold, and darkness. She paced the room with it the livelong night, hushing it and soothing it. She said at intervals, "Like Lilian when her mother died and left her!" Why was her step so quick, her eye so wild, her love so fierce and terrible whenever she repeated those words?

"But it is love," said Trotty. "It is love. She'll never cease to love it. My poor Meg!"

She dressed the child next morning with unusual care —ah, vain expenditure of care upon such squalid robes! —and once more tried to find some means of life. It was the last day of the old year. She tried till night and never broke her fast. She tried in vain.

She mingled with an abject crowd, who tarried in the snow until it pleased some officer appointed to dispense the public charity (the lawful charity; not that once preached upon a Mount) to call them in and question them, and say to this one, "Go to such a place," to that one, "Come next week;" to make a football of another wretch and pass him here and there from hand to hand, from house to house, until he wearied and lay down to die; or started up and robbed, and so became a higher sort of criminal, whose claims allowed of no delay. Here, too, she failed.

She loved her child and wished to have it lying on her breast. And that was quite enough.

It was night: a bleak, dark, cutting night: when, pressing the child close to her for warmth, she arrived outside the house she called her home. She was so faint and giddy that she saw no one standing in the doorway until she was close upon it and about to enter. Then she recognized the master of the house, who had so disposed himself—with his person it was not difficult—as to fill up the whole entry.

"Oh!" he said softly. "You have come back?"

She looked at the child and shook her head.

"Don't you think you have lived here long enough without paying any rent? Don't you think that, without any money, you've been a pretty constant customer at this shop, now?" said Mr. Tugby.

She repeated the same mute appeal.

"Suppose you try and deal somewhere else," he said. "And suppose you provide yourself with another lodging. Come! Don't you think you could manage it?"

She said in a low voice that it was very late. To-morrow.

"Now I see what you want," said Tugby; "and what you mean. You know there are two parties in this house about you, and you delight in setting 'em by the ears. I don't want any quarrels; I'm speaking softly to avoid a quarrel; but if you don't go away I'll speak out loud, and you shall cause words high enough to please you. But you shan't come in. That I'm determined."

She put her hair back with her hand and looked in a sudden manner at the sky and the dark lowering distance.

"This is the last night of an old year, and I won't carry ill-blood and quarrelings and disturbances into a new one to please you nor anybody else," said Tugby, who was quite a retail friend and father. "I wonder you ain't ashamed of yourself to carry such practices into a new year. If you haven't any business in the world but to be always giving way, and always making disturbances between man and wife, you'd be better out of it. Go along with you."

"Follow her! To desperation!"

Again the old man heard the voices. Looking up he saw the figures hovering in the air and pointing where she went down the dark street.

"She loves it!" he exclaimed in agonized entreaty for her. "Chimes! she loves it still!"

"Follow her!" The shadows swept upon the track she had taken like a cloud.

He joined in the pursuit; he kept close to her; he looked into her face. He saw the same fierce and terrible expression mingling with her love and kindling in her eyes. He heard her say, "Like Lilian! To be changed like Lilian!" and her speed redoubled.

Oh, for something to awaken her! For any sight, or sound, or scent, to call up tender recollections in a brain on fire! For any gentle image of the past to rise before her!

"I was her father! I was her father!" cried the old man, stretching out his hands to the dark shadows flying on above. "Have mercy on her and on me! Where does she go? Turn her back! I was her father!"

But they only pointed to her as she hurried on, and said, "To desperation! Learn it from the creature dearest to your heart!"

A hundred voices echoed it. The air was made of breath expended in those words. He seemed to take them in at every gasp he drew. They were everywhere and not to be escaped. And still she hurried on; the same light in her eyes, the same words in her mouth, "Like Lilian! To be changed like Lilian!"

All at once she stopped.

"Now turn her back!" exclaimed the old man, tearing his white hair. "My child! Meg! Turn her back! Great father, turn her back!"

In her own scanty shawl she wrapped the baby warm. With her fevered hands she smoothed its limbs, composed its face, arranged its mean attire. In her wasted arms she folded it as though she never would resign it more. And with her dry lips kissed it in a final pang and last long agony of love.

Putting its tiny hand up to her neck and holding it there, within her dress, next to her distracted heart, she set its sleeping face against her: closely, steadily, against her: and sped onward to the river.

To the rolling river, swift and dim, where Winter Night sat brooding like the last dark thoughts of many who had sought a refuge there before her. Where scattered lights upon the banks gleamed sullen, red, and dull as torches that were burning there to show the way to death. Where no abode of living people cast its shadow on the deep, impenetrable, melancholy shade.

To the river! To that portal of eternity her desperate footsteps tended with the swiftness of its rapid waters running to the sea. He tried to touch her as she passed him, going down to its dark level; but the wild distempered form, the fierce and terrible love, the desperation that had left all human check or hold behind swept by him like the wind.

He followed her. She paused a moment on the brink before the dreadful plunge. He fell down on his knees and in a shriek addressed the figures in the bells now hovering above them.

"I have learned it!" cried the old man. "From the creature dearest to my heart! Oh, save her, save her!"

He could wind his fingers in her dress; could hold it! As the words escaped his lips he felt his sense of touch return, and knew that he detained her.

The figures looked down steadfastly upon him.

"I have learned it!" cried the old man. "Oh, have mercy on me in this hour if in my love for her, so young and good, I slandered nature in the breasts of mothers rendered desperate! Pity my presumption, wickedness, and ignorance, and save her."

He felt his hold relaxing. They were silent still.

"Have mercy on her!" he exclaimed, "as one in whom this dreadful crime has sprung from love perverted; from the strongest, deepest love we fallen creatures know! Think what her misery must have been when such seed bears such fruit! Heaven meant her to be good. There is no loving mother on the earth who might not come to this if such a life had gone before. Oh, have mercy on my child, who even at this pass means mercy to her own, and dies herself, and perils her immortal soul to save it!"

She was in his arms. He held her now. His strength was like a giant's.

"I see the spirit of the chimes among you!" cried the old man, singling out the child, and speaking in some inspiration, which their looks conveyed to him. "I know that our inheritance is held in store for us by time. I know there is a sea of time to rise one day, before which all who wrong us or oppress us will be swept away like the leaves. I see it on the flow! I know that we must trust and hope, and neither doubt ourselves nor doubt the good in one another. I have learned it from the creature dearest to my heart. I clasp her in my arms again. O spirits, merciful and good, I take your lesson to my breast along with her! O spirits, merciful and good, I am grateful!"

He might have said more; but the bells, the old familiar bells, his own dear, constant, steady friends, the chimes, began to ring the joy-peals for a new year: so lustily, so merrily, so happily, so gayly that he leaped upon his feet and broke the spell that bound him.

"And whatever you do, father," said Meg, "don't eat tripe again without asking some doctor whether it's likely to agree with you; for how you have been going on, good gracious!"

She was working with her needle at the little table by the fire, dressing her simple gown with ribbons for her wedding. So quietly happy, so blooming and youthful, so full of beautiful promise that he uttered a great cry as if it were an angel in his house; then flew to clasp her in his arms.

But he caught his feet in the newspaper, which had fallen on the hearth; and somebody came rushing in between them.

"No!" cried the voice of this same somebody; a generous and jolly voice it was! "Not even you. Not even you. The first kiss of Meg in the new year is mine. Mine! I have been waiting outside the house this hour to hear the bells and claim it. Meg, my precious prize, a happy year! A life of happy years, my darling wife!"

And Richard smothered her with kisses.

You never in all your life saw anything like Trotty after this. I don't care where you have lived or what you have seen; you never in all your life saw anything at all approaching him! He sat down in his chair and beat his knees and cried; he sat down in his chair and beat his knees and laughed; he sat down in his chair and beat his knees and laughed and cried together; he got out of his chair and hugged Meg; he got out of his chair and hugged Richard; he got out of his chair and hugged them both at once; he kept running up to Meg and squeezing her fresh face between his hands and kissing it, going from her backward not to lose sight of it, and running up again like a figure in a magic lantern; and whatever he did he was constantly sitting himself down in his chair, and never stopping in it for one single moment; being—that's the truth—beside himself with joy.

"And to-morrow's your wedding-day, my pet!" cried Trotty. "Your real happy wedding-day!"

"To-day!" cried Richard, shaking hands with him.

"To-day. The chimes are ringing in the new year. Hear them!"

They were ringing! Bless their sturdy hearts, they were ringing! Great bells as they were; melodious, deep-mouthed, noble bells; cast in no common metal; made by no common founder; when had they ever chimed like that before!

"But, to-day, my pet," said Trotty. "You and Richard had some words to-day."

"Because he's such a bad fellow, father," said Meg. "Ain't you, Richard? Such a headstrong, violent man! He'd have made no more of speaking his mind to that great alderman and putting him down I don't know where than he would of——"

"Kissing Meg," suggested Richard. Doing it, too!

"No. Not a bit more," said Meg. "But I wouldn't let him, father. Where would have been the use?"

"Richard, my boy!" cried Trotty, "you was turned up trumps originally; and trumps you must be till you die! But you were crying by the fire to-night, my pet, when I came home! Why did you cry by the fire?"

"I was thinking of the years we've passed together, father. Only that. And thinking that you might miss me, and be lonely."

Trotty was backing off to that extraordinary chair again, when the child, who had been awakened by the noise, came running in half-dressed.

"Why, here she is!" cried Trotty, catching her up. "Here's little Lilian! Ha! ha! ha! Here we are and here we go. Oh, here we are and here we go again! And here we are and here we go! and Uncle Will, too!" Stopping in his trot to greet him heartily. "Oh, Uncle Will, the vision that I've had to-night through lodging you! Oh, Uncle Will, the obligations that you've laid me under by your coming, my good friend!"

Before Will Fern could make the least reply a band of music burst into the room, attended by a lot of neighbors, screaming "A Happy New Year, Meg!" "A happy wedding!" "Many of 'em!" and other fragmentary good wishes of that sort. The drum (who was a private friend of Trotty's) then stepped forward, and said:

"Trotty Veck, my boy! It's got about that your daughter is going to be married to-morrow. There ain't a soul that knows you that don't wish you well, or that knows her and don't wish her well. Or that knows you both, and don't wish you both all the happiness the new year can bring. And here we are to play it in and dance it in accordingly."

Which was received with a general shout. The drum was rather drunk, by the bye; but never mind.

"What a happiness it is, I'm sure," said Trotty, "to be so esteemed! How kind and neighborly you are! It's all along of my dear daughter. She deserves it."

They were ready for a dance in half a second (Meg and Richard at the top); and the drum was on the very brink of leathering away with all his power; when a combination of prodigious sounds was heard outside, and a good-humored comely woman of some fifty years of age, or thereabout, came running in, attended by a man bearing a stone pitcher of terrific size, and closely followed by the marrow-bones and cleavers, and the bells; not *the* bells, but a portable collection on a frame.

Trotty said, "It's Mrs. Chickenstalker!" And sat down and beat his knees again.

"Married, and not tell me, Meg!" cried the good woman. "Never! I couldn't rest on the last night of the old year without coming to wish you joy. I couldn't have done it, Meg. Not if I had been bed-ridden. So here I am; and as it's New Year's eve, and the eve of your wedding too, my dear, I had a little flip made, and brought it with me."

Mrs. Chickenstalker's notion of a little flip did honor to her character. The pitcher steamed and smoked and reeked like a volcano; and the man who had carried it was faint.

"Mrs. Tugby!" said Trotty, who had been going round and round her in an ecstasy—"I should say, Chickenstalker—bless your soul! A Happy New Year, and many of 'em! Mrs. Tugby," said Trotty when he had saluted her—"I should say, Chickenstalker—this is William Fern and Lilian."

The worthy dame, to his surprise, turned very pale and very red.

"Not Lilian Fern whose mother died in Dorsetshire!" said she.

Her uncle answered "Yes," and meeting hastily they exchanged some hurried words together; of which the upshot was that Mrs. Chickenstalker shook him by both hands; saluted Trotty on his cheek again of her own free will; and took the child to her capacious breast.

"Will Fern!" said Trotty, pulling on his right-hand muffler. "Not the friend you was hoping to find?"

"Ay!" returned Will, putting a hand on each of Trotty's shoulders. "And like to prove a'most as good a friend, if that can be, as one I found."

"Oh!" said Trotty. "Please to play up there. Will you have the goodness!"

To the music of the band, the bells, the marrow-bones, and cleavers, all at once; and while the chimes were yet in lusty operation out of doors, Trotty, making Meg and Richard second couple, led off Mrs. Chickenstalker down the dance, and danced it in a step unknown before or since; founded on his own peculiar trot.

Had Trotty dreamed? Or are his joys and sorrows and the actors in them but a dream; himself a dream; the teller of this tale a dreamer, waking but now? If it be so, O listener, dear to him in all his visions, try to bear in mind the stern realities from which these shadows come; and in your sphere—none is too wide, and none too limited for such an end—endeavor to correct, improve, and soften them. So may the new year be a happy one to you, happy to many more whose happiness depends on you! So may each year be happier than the last, and not the meanest of our brethren or sisterhood debarred their rightful share in what our great Creator formed them to enjoy.

THE

CRICKET ON THE HEARTH.

CHIRP THE FIRST.

THE kettle began it! Don't tell me what Mrs. Peerybingle said. I know better. Mrs. Peerybingle may leave it on record to the end of time that she couldn't say which of them began it; but I say the kettle did. I ought to know, I hope! The kettle began it full five mintues by the little waxy-faced Dutch clock in the corner before the cricket uttered a chirp.

As if the clock hadn't finished striking, and the convulsive little haymaker at the top of it, jerking away right and left with a scythe in front of a Moorish palace, hadn't mowed down half an acre of imaginary grass before the cricket joined in at all!

Why, I am not naturally positive. Every one knows that. I wouldn't set my own opinion against the opinion of Mrs. Peerybingle unless I were quite sure on any account whatever. Nothing should induce me. But this is a question of fact. And the fact is that the kettle began it at least five minutes before the cricket gave any sign of being in existence. Contradict me, and I'll say ten.

Let me narrate exactly how it happened. I should have proceeded to do so in my very first word but for this plain consideration—if I am to tell a story I must begin at the beginning; and how is it possible to begin at the beginning without beginning at the kettle?

It appeared as if there were a sort of match or trial of skill, you must understand, between the kettle and the cricket. And this is what led to it, and how it came about.

Mrs. Peerybingle, going out into the raw twilight, and clicking over the wet stones in a pair of pattens that worked innumerable rough impressions of the first proposition in Euclid all about the yard—Mrs. Peerybingle filled the kettle at the water-butt. Presently returning, less the pattens (and a good deal less, for they were tall and Mrs. Peerybingle was but short), she set the kettle on the fire. In doing which she lost her temper, or mislaid it for an instant; for the water being uncomfortably cold, and in that slippy, slushy, sleety sort of state wherein it seems to penetrate through every kind of substance, patten rings included—had laid hold of Mrs. Peerybingle's toes, and even splashed her legs. And when we rather plume ourselves (with reason to) upon our legs, and keep ourselves particularly neat in point of stockings, we find this, for the moment, hard to bear.

Besides, the kettle was aggravating and obstinate. It wouldn't allow itself to be adjusted on the top bar; it wouldn't hear of accommodating itself kindly to the knobs of coal; it would lean forward with a drunken air, and dribble, a very idiot of a kettle, on the hearth. It was quarrelsome, and hissed and spluttered morosely at the fire. To sum up all, the lid, resisting Mrs. Peerybingle's fingers, first of all turned topsy-turvy, and then, with an ingenious pertinacity deserving of a better cause, dived sideways in—down to the very bottom of the kettle. And the hull of the Royal George has never made half the monstrous resistance to coming out of the water which the lid of that kettle employed against Mrs. Peerybingle before she got it up again.

It looked sullen and pig-headed enough, even then; carrying its handle with an air of defiance, and cocking its spout pertly and mockingly at Mrs. Peerybingle, as if it said, "I won't boil. Nothing shall induce me!"

But Mrs. Peerybingle, with restored good-humor, dusted her chubby little hands against each other and sat down before the kettle, laughing. Meantime the jolly blaze uprose and fell, flashing and gleaming on the little haymaker at the top of the Dutch clock, until one might have thought he stood stock-still before the Moorish palace, and nothing was in motion but the flame.

He was on the move, however; and had his spasms, two to the second, all right and regular. But his sufferings when the clock was going to strike were frightful to behold; and when a cuckoo looked out of a trap-door in the palace, and gave note six times, it shook him each time like a spectral voice—or like a something wiry plucking at his legs.

It was not until a violent commotion and a whirring noise among the weights and ropes below him had quite subsided that this terrified haymaker became himself again. Nor was he startled without reason; for these rattling, bony skeletons of clocks are very disconcerting in their operation, and I wonder very much how any set of men, but most of all how Dutchmen, can have had a liking to invent them. There is a popular belief that Dutchmen love broad cases and much clothing for their own lower selves; and they might know better than to leave their clocks so very lank and unprotected, surely.

Now it was, you observe, that the kettle began to spend the evening. Now it was that the kettle, growing mellow and musical, began to have irrepressible gurglings in its throat, and to indulge in short vocal snorts, which it checked in the bud, as if it hadn't quite made up its mind yet to be good company. Now it was that after two or three such vain attempts to stifle its convivial sentiments, it threw off all moroseness, all reserve, and burst into a stream of song so cozy and hilarious as never maudling nightingale yet formed the least idea of.

So plain too! Bless you, you might have understood it like a book—better than some books you and I could name, perhaps. With its warm breath gushing forth in a light cloud which merrily and gracefully ascended a few feet, then hung about the chimney-corner as its own domestic heaven, it trolled its song with that strong energy of cheerfulness that its iron body hummed and stirred upon the fire; and the lid itself, the recently rebellious lid—such is the influence of a bright example—performed a sort of jig, and clattered like a deaf and dumb young cymbal that had never known the use of its twin brother.

That this song of the kettle's was a song of invitation and welcome to somebody out of doors, to somebody at that moment coming on toward the snug small home and the crisp fire, there is no doubt whatever. Mrs. Peerybingle knew it perfectly as she sat musing before the hearth. It's a dark night, sang the kettle, and the rotten leaves are lying by the way; and above all is mist and darkness, and below all is mire and clay; and there's only one relief in all the sad and murky air; and I don't know that it is one, for it's nothing but a glare of deep and angry crimson, where the sun and wind together set a brand upon the clouds for being guilty of such weather; and the widest open country is a long dull streak of black; and there's hoar-frost on the finger-post, and thaw upon the track; and the ice isn't water, and the water isn't free, and you couldn't say that anything is what it ought to be; but he is coming, coming, coming!

And here, if you like, the cricket did chime in! with a chirrup, chirrup, chirrup of such magnitude, by way of chorus; with a voice so astoundingly disproportionate to its size as compared with the kettle (size! you couldn't see it!) that if it had then and there burst itself like an overcharged gun, if it had fallen a victim on the spot and chirruped its little body into fifty pieces, it would have seemed a natural and inevitable consequence, for which it had expressly labored.

The kettle had had the last of its solo performance. It persevered with undiminished ardor; but the cricket took first fiddle and kept it. Good Heaven, how it chirped! Its shrill, sharp, piercing voice resounded through the house and seemed to twinkle in the outer darkness like a star. There was an indescribable little trill and tremble in it at its loudest, which suggested its being carried off its legs and made to leap again by its own intense enthusiasm. Yet they went very well together, the cricket and the kettle. The burden of the song was still the same; and louder, louder, louder still they sang it in their emulation.

The fair little listener—for fair she was, and young: though something of what is called the dumpling shape; but I don't myself object to that—lighted a candle, glanced at the haymaker on the top of the clock, who was getting in a pretty average crop of minutes, and looked out of the window, where she saw nothing, owing to the darkness, but her own face imaged in the glass. And my opinion is (and so would yours have been) that she might have looked a long way, and seen nothing half so agreeable. When she came back and sat down in her former seat the cricket and the kettle were still keeping it up with a perfect fury of competition. The kettle's weak side clearly being that he didn't know when he was beat.

There was all the excitement of a race about it. Chirp! chirp! chirp! Cricket a mile ahead. Hum! hum! hum—m—m! Kettle making play in the distance like a great top. Chirp! chirp! chirp! Cricket round the corner. Hum! hum! hum—m—m! Kettle sticking to him in his own way; no idea of giving in. Chirp! chirp! chirp! Cricket fresher than ever. Hum! hum! hum—m—m! Kettle slow and steady. Chirp! chirp! chirp! Cricket going in to finish him. Hum! hum! hum—m—m! Kettle not to be finished. Until at last they get so jumbled together, in the hurry-skurry, helter-skelter of the match, that whether the kettle chirped and the cricket hummed, or the cricket chirped and the kettle hummed, or they both chirped and both hummed, it would have taken a clearer head than yours or mine to have decided with anything like certainty. But of this there is no doubt: that the kettle and the cricket, at one and the same moment, and by some power of amalgamation best known to themselves, sent each his fireside song of comfort streaming into a ray of the candle that shone out through the window, and a long way down the lane. And this light bursting on a certain person who on the instant approached toward it through the gloom expressed the whole thing to him literally in a twinkling and cried, "Welcome home, old fellow! Welcome home, my boy!"

This end attained the kettle, being dead beat, boiled over, and was taken off the fire. Mrs. Peerybingle then went running to the door, where, what with the wheels of a cart, the tramp of a horse, the voice of a man, the tearing in and out of an excited dog, and the surprising and mysterious appearance of a baby, there was soon the very what's-his-name to pay.

Where the baby came from, or how Mrs. Peerybingle got hold of it in that flash of time, I don't know. But a live baby there was in Mrs. Peerybingle's arms; and a pretty tolerable amount of pride she seemed to have in it, when she was drawn gently to the fire by a sturdy figure of a man much taller and much older than herself, who had to stoop a long way down to kiss her. But she was worth the trouble. Six foot six, with the lumbago, might have done it.

"Oh, goodness, John!" said Mrs. P. "What a state you are in with the weather!"

He was something the worse for it, undeniably. The thick mist hung in clots upon his eyelashes like candied thaw; and between the fog and fire together, there were rainbows in his very whiskers.

"Why, you see, Dot," John made answer slowly as he unrolled a shawl from about his throat and warmed his hands, "it—it ain't exactly summer weather. So, no wonder."

"I wish you wouldn't call me Dot, John, I don't like it," said Mrs. Peerybingle: pouting in a way that clearly showed she did like it very much.

"Why, what else are you?" returned John, looking down upon her with a smile, and giving her waist as light a squeeze as his huge hand and arm could give. "A dot and"—here he glanced at the baby—"a dot and carry—I won't say it, for fear I should spoil it; but I was very near a joke. I don't know as ever I was nearer."

He was often near to something or other very clever, by his own account: this lumbering, slow, honest John; this John so heavy, but so light of spirit; so rough upon the surface, but so gentle at the core; so dull without, so quick within; so stolid, but so good! Oh, Mother Nature, give thy children the true poetry of heart that hid itself in this poor carrier's breast—he was but a carrier by the way—and we can bear to have them talking prose and leading lives of prose; and bear to bless thee for their company!

It was pleasant to see Dot, with her little figure, and her baby in her arms: a very doll of a baby: glancing with a coquettish thoughtfulness at the fire and inclining her delicate little head just enough on one side to let it rest in an odd, half-natural, half-affected, wholly nestling and agreeable manner on the great rugged figure of the carrier. It was pleasant to see him with his tender awkwardness, endeavoring to adapt his rude support to her slight need, and make his burly middle-age a leaning-staff not inappropriate to her blooming youth. It was pleasant to observe how Tilly Slowboy, waiting in the background for the baby, took special cognizance (though in her earliest teens) of this grouping; and stood with her mouth and eyes wide open, and her head thrust forward taking it in as if it were air. Nor was it less agreeable to observe how John the carrier, reference being made by

Dot to the aforesaid baby, checked his hand when on the point of touching the infant, as if he thought he might crack it; and bending down surveyed it from a safe distance with a kind of puzzled pride, such as an amiable mastiff might be supposed to show if he found himself one day the father of a young canary.

"Ain't he beautiful, John? Don't he look precious in his sleep?"

"Very precious," said John. "Very much so. He generally is asleep, ain't he?"

"Lor, John! Good gracious, no!"

"Oh," said John, pondering. "I thought his eyes was generally shut. Halloo!"

"Goodness, John, how you startle one!"

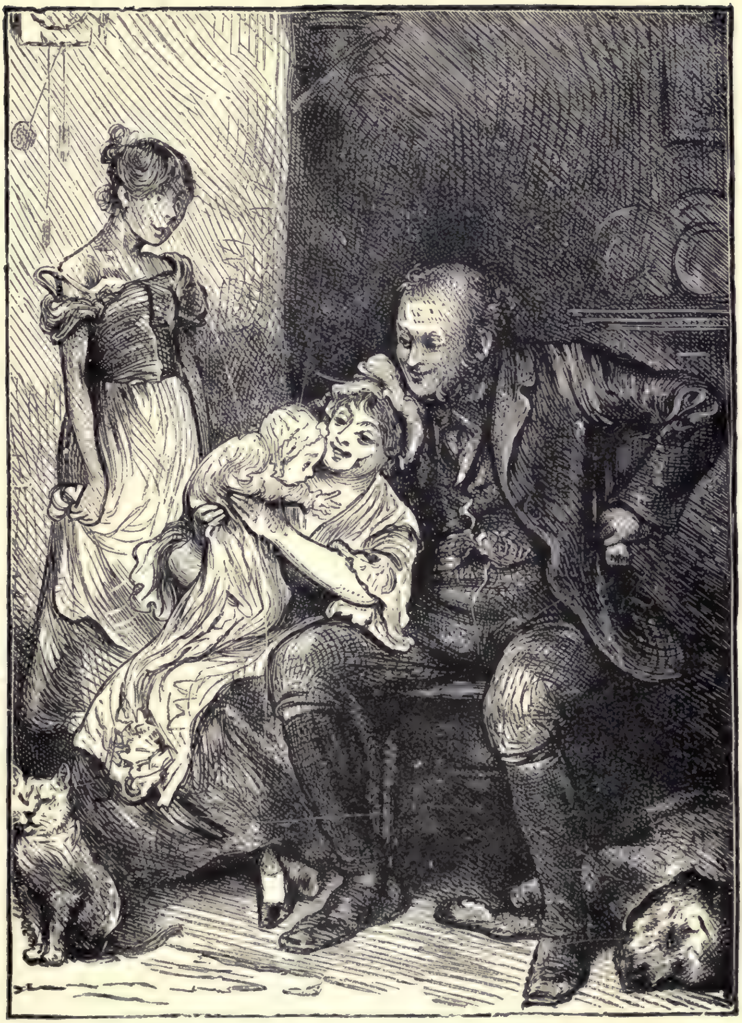
"It ain't right for him to turn 'em up in that way!" said the astonished carrier, "is it? See how he's winking with both of 'em at once! And look at his mouth! Why, he's gasping like a gold and silver fish!"

"You don't deserve to be a father, you don't," said Dot with all the dignity of an experienced matron. "But how should you know what little complaints children are troubled with, John! You wouldn't so much as know their names, you stupid fellow." And when she had turned the baby over on her left arm and had slapped its back as a restorative she pinched her husband's ear, laughing.

"No," said John, pulling off his outer coat. "It's very true, Dot. I don't know much about it. I only know that I've been fighting pretty stiffly with the wind to-night. It's been blowing northeast, straight into the cart the whole way home."

"Poor old man, so it has!" cried Mrs. Peerybingle, instantly becoming very active. "Here! Take the precious darling, Tilly, while I make myself of some use. Bless it, I could smother it with kissing it, I could! Hie then, good dog! Hie, Boxer, boy! Only let me make the tea first, John; and then I'll help you with the parcels like a busy bee. 'How doth the little'—and all the rest of it, you know, John. Did you ever learn 'how doth the little' when you went to school, John?"

"Not to quite know it," John returned. "I was very near it once. But I should only have spoiled it, I dare say."



"AN'T HE BEAUTIFUL, JOHN?"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Dot. She had the blithest little laugh you ever heard. "What a dear old darling of a dunce you are, John, to be sure!"

Not at all disputing this position, John went out to see that the boy with the lantern which had been dancing to and fro before the door and window like a will-o'-the-wisp took due care of the horse, who was fatter than you would quite believe, if I gave you his measure, and so old that his birthday was lost in the mists of antiquity. Boxer, feeling that his attentions were due to the family in general and must be impartially distributed, dashed in and out with bewildering inconstancy; now describing a circle of short barks round the horse, where he was being rubbed down at the stable-door; now feigning to make savage rushes at his mistress, and facetiously bringing himself to sudden stops; now eliciting a shriek from Tilly Slowboy in the low nursing-chair near the fire by the unexpected application of his moist nose to her countenance; now exhibiting an obtrusive interest in the baby; now going round and round upon the hearth and lying down as if he had established himself for the night; now, getting up again and taking that nothing of a fag-end of a tail of his out into the weather, as if he had just remembered an appointment and was off at a round trot to keep it.

"There! There's the teapot ready on the hob!" said Dot, as briskly busy as a child at play at keeping house. "And there's the old knuckle of ham; and there's the butter; and there's the crusty loaf, and all! Here's the clothes-basket for the small parcels, John, if you've got any there—where are you, John? Don't let the dear child fall under the grate, Tilly, whatever you do!"

It may be noted of Miss Slowboy, in spite of her rejecting the caution with some vivacity, that she had a rare and surprising talent for getting this baby into difficulties, and had several times imperiled its short life in a quiet way peculiarly her own. She was of a spare and straight shape, this young lady, insomuch that her garments appeared to be in constant danger of sliding off those sharp pegs, her shoulders, on which they were loosely hung. Her costume was remarkable for the partial development on all possible occasions of some flannel vestment of a singular structure; also for affording glimpses in the region of the back of a corset, or pair of stays, in color a dead-green. Being always in a state of gaping admiration at everything, and absorbed besides in the perpetual contemplation of her mistress' perfections and the baby's, Miss Slowboy, in her little errors of judgment, may be said to have done equal honor to her head and to her heart; and though these did less honor to the baby's head, which they were the occasional means of bringing into contact with deal doors, dressers, stair-rails, bedposts, and other foreign substances, still they were the honest results of Tilly Slowboy's constant astonishment at finding herself so kindly treated and installed in such a comfortable home. For the maternal and paternal Slowboy were alike unknown to fame, and Tilly had been bred by public charity, a foundling; which word, though only differing from fondling by one vowel's length, is very different in meaning and expresses quite another thing.

To have seen little Mrs. Peerybingle come back with her husband, tugging at the clothes-basket and making the most strenuous exertions to do nothing at all (for he carried it), would have amused you almost as much as it amused him. It may have entertained the cricket too, for anything I know; but certainly it now began to chirp again vehemently.

"Heyday!" said John in his slow way. "It's merrier than ever to-night, I think."

"And it's sure to bring us good fortune, John! It always has done so. To have a cricket on the hearth is the luckiest thing in all the world!"

John looked at her as if he had very nearly got the thought into his head that she was his cricket in chief, and he quite agreed with her. But it was probably one of his narrow escapes, for he said nothing.

"The first time I heard its cheerful little note, John, was on that night when you brought me home—when you brought me to my new home here; its little mistress. Nearly a year ago. You recollect, John?"

Oh, yes. John remembered. I should think so!

"Its chirp was such a welcome to me! It seemed so full of promise and encouragement. It seemed to say you would be kind and gentle with me and would not expect (I had a fear of that, John, then) to find an old head on the shoulders of your foolish little wife."

John thoughtfully patted one of the shoulders and then the head, as though he would have said no, no; he had had no such expectation; he had been quite content to take them as they were. And really he had reason. They were very comely.

"It spoke the truth, John, when it seemed to say so; for you have ever been, I am sure, the best, the most considerate, the most affectionate of husbands to me. This has been a happy home, John; and I love the cricket for its sake!"

"Why, so do I, then," said the carrier. "So do I, Dot."

"I love it for the many times I have heard it and the many thoughts its harmless music has given me. Sometimes, in the twilight, when I have felt a little solitary and down-hearted, John—before baby was here to keep me company and make the house gay—when I have thought how lonely you would be if I should die; how lonely I should be if I could know that you had lost me, dear, its chirp, chirp, chirp upon the hearth has seemed to tell me of another little voice, so sweet, so very dear to me, before whose coming sound my trouble vanished like a dream. And when I used to fear—I did fear once, John, I was very young, you know—that ours might prove to be an ill-assorted marriage, I being such a child and you more like my guardian than my husband; and that you might not, however hard you tried, be able to learn to love me as you hoped and prayed you might, its chirp, chirp, chirp has cheered me up again and filled me with new trust and confidence. I was thinking of these things to-night, dear, when I sat expecting you; and I love the cricket for their sake!"

"And so do I," repeated John. "But, Dot, I hope and pray that I might learn to love you? How you talk! I had learned that long before I brought you here to be the cricket's little mistress, Dot!"

She laid her hand an instant on his arm and looked up at him with an agitated face as if she would have told him something. Next moment she was down upon her knees before the basket, speaking in a sprightly voice and busy with the parcels.

"There are not many of them to-night, John, but I saw some goods behind the cart just now; and though they give more trouble, perhaps, still they pay as well; so we have no reason to grumble, have we? Besides, you have been delivering, I dare say, as you came along?"

"Oh, yes," John said. "A good many."

"Why, what's this round box? Heart alive, John, it's a wedding-cake!"

"Leave a woman alone to find out that," said John admiringly. "Now, a man would never have thought of it. Whereas it's my belief that if you was to pack a wedding-cake up in a tea-chest, or a turn-up bedstead, or a pickled-salmon keg, or any unlikely thing, a woman would be sure to find it out directly. Yes; I called for it at the pastry-cook's."

"And it weighs I don't know what—whole hundredweights!" cried Dot, making a great demonstration of trying to lift it. "Whose is it, John? Where is it going?"

"Read the writing on the other side," said John.

"Why, John! My goodness, John!"

"Ah! who'd have thought it!" John returned.

"You never mean to say," pursued Dot, sitting on the floor and shaking her head at him, "that it's Gruff and Tackleton, the toymaker!"

John nodded.

Mrs. Peerybingle nodded also fifty times at least. Not in assent—in dumb and pitying amazement; screwing up her lips the while with all her little force (they were never made for screwing up; I am clear of that), and looking the good carrier through and through in her abstraction. Miss Slowboy in the mean time, who had a mechanical power of reproducing scraps of current conversation for the delectation of the baby, with all the sense struck out of them, and all the nouns changed into the plural number, inquired aloud of that young creature, was it Gruffs and Tackletons the toymakers then, and would it call at pastry-cooks for wedding-cakes, and did its mothers know the boxes when its fathers brought them homes; and so on.

"And that is really to come about?" said Dot. "Why, she and I were girls at school together, John."

He might have been thinking of her, or nearly thinking of her, perhaps, as she was in that same school-time. He looked upon her with a thoughtful pleasure, but he made no answer.

"And he's as old! As unlike her! Why, how many years older than you is Gruff and Tackleton, John?"

"How many more cups of tea shall I drink to-night at one sitting than Gruff and Tackleton ever took in four, I wonder!" replied John good-humoredly as he drew a chair to the round table and began at the cold ham. "As to eating, I eat but little; but that little I enjoy, Dot."

Even this, his usual sentiment at meal-times, one of his innocent delusions (for his appetite was always obstinate and flatly contradicted him), awoke no smile in the face of his little wife, who stood among the parcels, pushing the cake-box slowly from her with her foot, and never once looked, though her eyes were cast down too, upon the dainty shoe she generally was so mindful of. Absorbed in thought she stood there, heedless alike of the tea and John (although he called to her, and rapped the table with his knife to startle her), until he rose and touched her on the arm; when she looked at him for a moment, and hurried to her place behind the tea-board, laughing at her negligence. But not as she had laughed before. The manner and the music were quite changed.

The cricket, too, had stopped. Somehow the room was not so cheerful as it had been. Nothing like it.

"So these are all the parcels, are they, John?" she said, breaking a long silence which the honest carrier had devoted to the practical illustration of one part of his favorite sentiment—certainly enjoying what he ate, if it couldn't be admitted that he ate but little. "So these are all the parcels, are they, John?"

"That's all," said John. "Why—no—I——" laying down his knife and fork, and taking a long breath. "I declare—I've clean forgotten the old gentleman!"

"The old gentleman?"

"In the cart," said John. "He was asleep among the straw the last time I saw him. I've very nearly remembered him twice since I came in; but he went out of my head again. Halloo! Yahip there! Rouse up! That's my hearty!"

John said these latter words outside the door, whither he had hurried with the candle in his hand.

Miss Slowboy, conscious of some mysterious reference to the old gentleman, and connecting in her mystified imagination certain associations of a religious nature with the phrase, was so disturbed that, hastily rising from the low chair by the fire to seek protection near the skirts of her mistress, and coming into contact as she crossed the doorway with an ancient stranger, she instinctively made a charge or butt at him with the only offensive instrument within her reach. This instrument happening to be the baby, great commotion and alarm ensued, which the sagacity of Boxer rather tended to increase; for that good dog, more thoughtful than its master, had, it seemed, been watching the old gentleman in his sleep, lest he should walk off with a few young poplar trees that were tied up behind the cart; and he still attended on him very closely, worrying his gaiters in fact, and making dead sets at the buttons.

"You're such an undeniable good sleeper, sir," said John, when tranquillity was restored; in the mean time the old gentleman had stood bareheaded and motionless in the center of the room; "that I have half a mind to ask you where the other six are—only that would be a joke, and I know I should spoil it. Very near, though," murmured the carrier with a chuckle; "very near!"

The stranger, who had long white hair, good features, singularly bold and well defined for an old man, and dark, bright, penetrating eyes, looked round with a smile and saluted the carrier's wife by gravely inclining his head.

His garb was very quaint and odd—a long, long way behind the time. Its hue was brown all over. In his hand he held a great brown club or walking-stick; and striking this upon the floor it fell asunder, and became a chair. On which he sat down quite composedly.

"There!" said the carrier, turning to his wife. "That's the way I found him, sitting by the roadside! Upright as a milestone. And almost as deaf."

"Sitting in the open air, John!"

"In the open air," replied the carrier, "just at dusk. 'Carriage paid,' he said; and gave me eighteenpence. Then he got in. And there he is."

"He's going, John, I think!"

Not at all. He was only going to speak.

"If you please, I was to be left till called for," said the stranger mildly. "Don't mind me."

With that he took a pair of spectacles from one of his large pockets, and a book from another, and leisurely began to read, making no more of Boxer than if he had been a house lamb!

The carrier and his wife exchanged a look of perplexity. The stranger raised his head, and glancing from the latter to the former, said:

"Your daughter, my good friend?"

"Wife," returned John.

"Niece?" said the stranger.

"Wife," roared John.

"Indeed?" said the stranger. "Surely? Very young!"

He quietly turned over, and resumed his reading. But before he could have read two lines he again interrupted himself to say:

"Baby yours?"

John gave him a gigantic nod; equivalent to an answer in the affirmative delivered through a speaking-trumpet.

"Girl?'

"Bo-o-oy!" roared John.

"Also very young, eh?"

Mrs. Peerybingle instantly struck in. "Two months and three da-ays! Vaccinated just six weeks ago-o! Took very fine-ly! Considered by the doctor a remarkably beautiful chi-ild! Equal to the general run of children at five months o-old! Takes notice in a way quite won-der-ful! May seem impossible to you, but feels his legs al-ready!"

Here the breathless little mother, who had been shrieking these short sentences into the old man's ear until her pretty face was crimsoned, held up the baby before him as a stubborn and triumphant fact; while Tilly Slowboy, with a melodious cry of "Ketcher, ketcher"—which sounded like some unknown words adapted to a popular sneeze—performed some cow-like gambols round that all-unconscious innocent.

"Hark! He's called for, sure enough," said John. "There's somebody at the door. Open it, Tilly."

Before she could reach it, however, it was opened from without; being a primitive sort of door with a latch that any one could lift if he chose—and a good many people did choose, for all kinds of neighbors liked to have a cheerful word or two with the carrier, though he was no great talker himself. Being opened, it gave admission to a little, meager, thoughtful, dingy-faced man, who seemed to have made himself a great-coat from the sack-cloth covering of some old box; for when he turned to shut the door and keep the weather out he disclosed upon the back of that garment the inscription G & T in large black capitals. Also the word glass in bold characters.

"Good-evening, John!" said the little man. "Good-evening, mum. Good-evening, Tilly. Good-evening, unbeknown! How's baby, mum? Boxer's pretty well, I hope?"

"All thriving, Caleb," replied Dot. "I am sure you need only look at the dear child, for one, to know that."

"And I'm sure I need only look at you for another," said Caleb.

He didn't look at her, though; he had a wandering and thoughtful eye which seemed to be always projecting itself into some other time and place, no matter what he said; a description which will equally apply to his voice.

"Or at John for another,'" said Caleb. "Or at Tilly, as far as that goes. Or certainly at Boxer."

"Busy just now, Caleb?" asked the carrier.

"Why, pretty well, John," he returned with the distraught air of a man who was casting about for the philosopher's stone at least. "Pretty much so. There's rather a run on Noah's arks at present. I could have wished to improve upon the family, but I don't see how it's to be done at the price. It would be a satisfaction to one's mind to make it clearer which was Shems and Hams, and which was wives. Flies ain't on that scale neither, as compared with elephants, you know! Ah, well! Have you got anything in the parcel line for me, John?"

The carrier put his hand into a pocket of the coat he had taken off and brought out, carefully preserved in moss and paper, a tiny flower-pot.

"There it is!" he said, adjusting it with great care. "Not so much as a leaf damaged. Full of buds!"

Caleb's dull eye brightened as he took it and thanked him.

"Dear, Caleb," said the carrier. "Very dear at this season."

"Never mind that. It would be cheap to me whatever it cost," returned the little man. "Anything else, John?"

"A small box," replied the carrier. "Here you are!"

"'For Caleb Plummer,'" said the little man, spelling out the direction. "'With cash.' With cash, John? I don't think it's for me."

"With care," returned the carrier, looking over his shoulder. "Where do you make out cash?"

"Oh! To be sure!" said Caleb. "It's all right. With care! Yes, yes; that's mine. It might have been with cash, indeed, if my dear boy in the golden South Americas had lived, John. You loved him as a son; didn't you? You needn't say you did. I know, of course. 'Caleb Plummer. With care.' Yes, yes, it's all right. It's a box of dolls' eyes for my daughter's work. I wish it was her own sight in a box, John."

"I wish it was, or could be!" cried the carrier.

"Thank'ee, said the little man. "You speak very hearty. To think that she should never see the dolls—and them a-staring at her so bold all day long! That's where it cuts. What's the damage, John?"

"I'll damage you," said John, "if you inquire. Dot! Very near?"

"Well! it's like you to say so," observed the little man. "It's your kind way. Let me see. I think that's all."

"I think not," said the carrier. "Try again."

"Something for our governor, eh?" said Caleb after pondering a little while. "To be sure. That's what I came for; but my head's so running on them arks and things! He hasn't been here, has he?"

"Not he," returned the carrier. "He's too busy courting."

"He's coming round, though," said Caleb; "for he told me to keep on the near side of the road going home, and it was ten to one he'd take me up. I had better go. By the bye, you couldn't have the goodness to let me pinch Boxer's tail, mum, for half a moment, could you?"

"Why, Caleb! what a question!"

"Oh, never mind, mum," said the little man. "He mightn't like it perhaps. There's a small order just come in for barking dogs; and I should wish to go as close to natur' as I could for sixpence. That's all. Never mind, mum."

It happened opportunely that Boxer, without receiving the proposed stimulus, began to bark with great zeal. But as this implied the approach of some new visitor, Caleb, postponing his study from the life to a more convenient season, shouldered the round box and took a hurried leave. He might have spared himself the trouble, for he met the visitor upon the threshold.

"Oh! You are here, are you? Wait a bit. I'll take you home. John Peerybingle, my service to you. More of my service to your pretty wife. Handsomer every day! Better too, if possible! And younger," mused the speaker in a low voice; "that's the devil of it!"

"I should be astonished at your paying compliments, Mr. Tackleton," said Dot, not with the best grace in the world, "but for your condition."

"You know all about it, then?"

"I have got myself to believe it, somehow," said Dot.

"After a hard struggle, I suppose?"

"Very."

Tackleton, the toy merchant, pretty generally known as Gruff & Tackleton—for that was the firm, though Gruff had been bought out long ago; only leaving his name, and as some said his nature, according to its dictionary meaning, in the business—Tackleton, the toy merchant, was a man whose vocation had been quite misunderstood by his parents and guardians. If they had made him a money-lender, or a sharp attorney, or a sheriff's officer, or a broker, he might have sown his discontented oats in his youth, and after having had the full run of himself in ill-natured transactions, might have turned out amiable at last for the sake of a little freshness and novelty. But, cramped and chafing in the peaceable pursuit of toy-making, he was a domestic ogre, who had been living on children all his life and was their implacable enemy. He despised all toys; wouldn't have bought one for the world; delighted, in his malice, to insinuate grim expressions into the faces of brown-paper farmers who drove pigs to market, bellmen who advertised lost lawyers' consciences, movable old ladies who darned stockings or carved pies; and other like samples of his stock in trade. In appalling masks; hideous, hairy, red-eyed jacks in boxes; vampire kites; demoniacal tumblers who wouldn't lie down and were perpetually flying forward to stare infants out of countenance, his soul reveled. They were his only relief and safety-valve. He was great in such inventions. Anything suggestive of a pony nightmare was delicious to him. He had even lost money (and he took to that toy very kindly) by getting up goblin slides for magic-lanterns, whereon the powers of darkness were depicted as a sort of supernatural shell-fish with human faces. In intensifying the portraiture of giants he had sunk quite a little capital; and though no painter himself he could indicate, for the instruction of his artists, with a piece of chalk, a certain furtive leer for the countenances of those monsters which was safe to destroy the peace of mind of any young gentleman between the ages of six and eleven for the whole Christmas or midsummer vacation.

What he was in toys he was (as most men are) in other things. You may easily suppose, therefore, that within the great green cape, which reached down to the calves of his legs, there was buttoned up to the chin an uncommonly pleasant fellow; and that he was about as choice a spirit and as agreeable a companion as ever stood in a pair of bull-headed looking boots with mahogany-colored tops.

Still Tackleton, the toy merchant, was going to be married. In spite of all this he was going to be married. And to a young wife too, a beautiful young wife.

He didn't look much like a bridegroom as he stood in the carrier's kitchen with a twist in his dry face and a screw in his body, and his hat jerked over the bridge of his nose, and his hands tucked down into the bottoms of his pockets, and his whole sarcastic, ill-conditioned self peering out of one little corner of one little eye, like the concentrated essence of any number of ravens. But a bridegroom he designed to be.

"In three days' time. Next Thursday. The last day of the first month in the year. That's my wedding-day," said Tackleton.

Did I mention that he had always one eye wide open, and one eye nearly shut, and that the one eye nearly shut was always the expressive eye? I don't think I did.

"That's my wedding-day!" said Tackleton, rattling his money.

"Why, it's our wedding-day, too," exclaimed the carrier.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Tackleton. "Odd! You're just such another couple. Just!"

The indignation of Dot at this presumptuous assertion is not to be described. What next? His imagination would compass the possibility of just such another baby, perhaps. The man was mad.

"I say! A word with you," murmured Tackleton, nudging the carrier with his elbow, and taking him a little apart. "You'll come to the wedding? We're in the same boat, you know."

"How in the same boat?"

"A little disparity, you know," said Tackleton with another nudge. "Come and spend an evening with us beforehand."

"Why?" demanded John, astonished at this pressing hospitality.

"Why?" returned the other. "That's a new way of receiving an invitation. Why, for pleasure—sociability, you know, and all that!"

"I thought you were never sociable," said John in his plain way.

"Tchah! It's of no use to be anything but free with you, I see," said Tackleton. "Why, then, the truth is you have a—what tea-drinking people call a sort of a comfortable appearance together, you and your wife. We know better, you know, but——"

"No, we don't know better," interposed John. "What are you talking about?"

"Well! We don't know better, then," said Tackleton. "We'll agree that we don't. As you like; what does it matter? I was going to say as you have that sort of appearance, your company will produce a favorable effect on Mrs. Tackleton that will be. And though I don't think your good lady's very friendly to me in this matter, still she can't help herself from falling into my views, for there's a compactness and coziness of appearance about her that always tells even in an indifferent case. You'll say you'll come?"

"We have arranged to keep our wedding-day (as far as that goes) at home," said John. "We have made the promise to ourselves these six months. We think, you see, that home——"

"Bah! what's home?" cried Tackleton. "Four walls and a ceiling! (Why don't you kill that cricket? I would! I always do. I hate their noise.) There are four walls and a ceiling at my house. Come to me!"

"You kill your crickets, eh?" said John.

"Scrunch 'em, sir," returned the other, setting his heel heavily on the floor. "You'll say you'll come? It's as much your interest as mine, you know, that the women should persuade each other that they're quiet and contented, and couldn't be better off. I know their way. Whatever one woman says, another woman is determined to clinch always. There's that spirit of emulation among 'em, sir, that if your wife says to my wife, 'I'm the happiest woman in the world, and mine's the best husband in the world, and I dote on him,' my wife will say the same to yours, or more, and half-believe it."

"Do you mean to say she don't, then?" asked the carrier.

"Don't!" cried Tackleton with a short, sharp laugh. "Don't what?"

The carrier had some faint idea of adding, "dote upon you." But, happening to meet the half-closed eye as it twinkled upon him over the turned-up collar of the cape, which was within an ace of poking it out, he felt it such an unlikely part and parcel of anything to be doted on that he substituted, "that she don't believe it?"

"Ah, you dog! You're joking," said Tackleton.

But the carrier, though slow to understand the full drift of his meaning, eyed him in such a serious manner that he was obliged to be a little more explanatory.

"I have the humor," said Tackleton, holding up the fingers of his left hand and tapping the forefinger, to imply "there I am, Tackleton, to wit:" "I have the humor, sir, to marry a young wife, and a pretty wife:" here he rapped his little finger to express the bride; not sparingly, but sharply; with a sense of power. "I'm able to gratify that humor and I do. It's my whim. But—now look there!"

He pointed to where Dot was sitting thoughtfully before the fire, leaning her dimpled chin upon her hand and watching the bright blaze. The carrier looked at her, and then at him, and then at her, and then at him again.

"She honors and obeys, no doubt, you know," said Tackleton; "and that, as I am not a man of sentiment, is quite enough for me. But do you think there's anything more in it?"

"I think," observed the carrier, "that I should chuck any man out of window who said there wasn't."

"Exactly so," returned the other with an unusual alacrity of assent. "To be sure! Doubtless you would. Of course. I'm certain of it. Good-night. Pleasant dreams!"

The carrier was puzzled and made uncomfortable and uncertain in spite of himself. He couldn't help showing it in his manner.

"Good-night, my dear friend!" said Tackleton compassionately. "I'm off. We're exactly alike in reality, I see. You won't give us to-morrow evening? Well! Next day you go out visiting, I know. I'll meet you there, and bring my wife that is to be. It'll do her good. You're agreeable? Thank'ee. What's that?"

It was a loud cry from the carrier's wife: a loud, sharp, sudden cry, that made the room ring like a glass vessel. She had risen from her seat and stood like one transfixed by terror and surprise. The stranger had advanced toward the fire to warm himself and stood within a short stride of her chair. But quite still.

"Dot!" cried the carrier. "Mary! Darling! What's the matter?"

They were all about her in a moment. Caleb, who had been dozing on the cake-box in the first imperfect recovery of his suspended presence of mind, seized Miss Slowboy by the hair of her head, but immediately apologized.

"Mary!" exclaimed the carrier, supporting her in his arms. "Are you ill? What is it? Tell me, dear!"

She only answered by beating her hands together and falling into a wild fit of laughter. Then, sinking from his grasp upon the ground, she covered her face with her apron and wept bitterly. And then she laughed again, and then she said how cold it was, and suffered him to lead her to the fire, where she sat down as before. The old man standing, as before, quite still.

"I'm better, John," she said. "I'm quite well now—I—" "John!" But John was on the other side of her. Why turn her face toward the strange old gentleman as if addressing him? Was her brain wandering? "Only a fancy, John dear—a kind of shock—a something coming suddenly before my eyes—I don't know what it was. It's quite gone, quite gone."

"I'm glad it's gone," muttered Tackleton, turning the expressive eye all round the room. "I wonder where it's gone, and what it was. Humph! Caleb, come here! Who's that with the gray hair?"

"I don't know, sir," returned Caleb in a whisper. "Never see him before in all my life. A beautiful figure for a nut-cracker; quite a new model. With a screw-jaw opening down into his waistcoat he'd be lovely."

"Not ugly enough," said Tackleton.

"Or for a firebox, either," observed Caleb in deep contemplation, "what a model! Unscrew his head to put the matches in; turn him heels up'ards for the light; and what a firebox for a gentleman's mantel-shelf just as he stands!"

"Not half ugly enough," said Tackleton. "Nothing in him at all! Come! Bring that box! All right now, I hope?"

"Oh, quite gone! Quite gone!" said the little woman, waving him hurriedly away. "Good-night!"

"Good-night," said Tackleton. "Good-night, John Peerybingle! Take care how you carry that box, Caleb. Let it fall, and I'll murder you! Dark as pitch, and weather worse than ever, eh? Good-night."

So with another sharp look round the room he went out at the door; followed by Caleb with the wedding-cake on his head.

The carrier had been so much astounded by his little wife and so busily engaged in soothing and tending her that he had scarcely been conscious of the stranger's presence until now, when he again stood there, their only guest.

"He don't belong to them, you see," said John. "I must give him a hint to go."

"I beg your pardon, friend," said the old gentleman, advancing to him; "the more so, as I fear your wife has not been well; but the attendant whom my infirmity," he touched his ears and shook his head, "renders almost indispensable not having arrived, I fear there must be some mistake. The bad night which made the shelter of your comfortable cart (may I never have a worse!) so acceptable is still as bad as ever. Would you, in your kindness, suffer me to rent a bed here?"

"Yes, yes," cried Dot. "Yes! Certainly!"

"Oh!" said the carrier, surprised by the rapidity of this consent. "Well! I don't object; but still I'm not quite sure that——"

"Hush!" she interrupted. "Dear John!"

"Why, he's stone-deaf," urged John.

"I know he is, but— Yes, sir, certainly. Yes! certainly! I'll make him up a bed directly, John."

As she hurried off to do it, the flutter of her spirits and the agitation of her manner were so strange that the carrier stood looking after her quite confounded.

"Did its mothers make it up a beds then!" cried Miss Slowboy to the baby; "and did its hair grow brown and curly when its caps was lifted off, and frighten it, a precious pets, a-sitting by the fires!"

With that unaccountable attraction of the mind to trifles, which is often incidental to a state of doubt and confusion, the carrier as he walked slowly to and fro found himself mentally repeating even these absurd words many times. So many times that he got them by heart, and was still conning them over and over like a lesson when Tilly, after administering as much friction to the little bald head with her hand as she thought wholesome (according to the practice of nurses), had once more tied the baby's cap on.

"And frighten it a precious pets, a-sitting by the fires. What frightened Dot, I wonder!" mused the carrier, pacing to and fro.

He scouted from his heart the insinuations of the toy merchant, and yet they filled him with a vague, indefinite uneasiness. For Tackleton was quick and sly; and he had that painful sense, himself, of being a man of slow perception, that a broken hint was always worrying to him. He certainly had no intention in his mind of linking anything that Tackleton had said with the unusual conduct of his wife, but the two subjects of reflection came into his mind together, and he could not keep them asunder.

The bed was soon made ready; and the visitor, declining all refreshment but a cup of tea, retired. Then Dot—quite well again, she said, quite well again—arranged the great chair in the chimney-corner for her husband; filled his pipe and gave it him; and took her usual little stool beside him on the hearth.

She always would sit on that little stool. I think she must have had a kind of notion that it was a coaxing, wheedling little stool.

She was out and out the very best filler of a pipe, I should say, in the four quarters of the globe. To see her put that chubby little finger in the bowl and then blow down the pipe to clear the tube. and when she had done so affect to think that there was really something in the tube and blow a dozen times, and hold it to her eye like a telescope, with a most provoking twist in her capital little face as she looked down it, was quite a brilliant thing. As to the tobacco, she was perfect mistress of the subject; and her lighting of the pipe, with a wisp of paper, when the carrier had it in his mouth—going so very near his nose, and yet not scorching it—was art, high art.

And the cricket and the kettle, turning up again, acknowledged it! The bright fire blazing again acknowledged it! The little mower on the clock, in his unheeded work, acknowledged it! The carrier, in his smoothing forehead and expanding face, acknowledged it the readiest of all.

And as he soberly and thoughtfully puffed at his old pipe, and as the Dutch clock ticked, and as the red fire gleamed, and as the cricket chirped, that genius of his hearth and home (for such the cricket was) came out in fairy shape into the room and summoned many forms of home about him. Dots of all ages and all sizes filled the chamber. Dots who were merry children, running on before him gathering flowers in the fields; coy Dots, half-shrinking from, half-yielding to, the pleading of his own rough image; newly married Dots alighting at the door, and taking wondering possession of the household keys; motherly little Dots, attended by fictitious Slowboys, bearing babies to be christened; matronly Dots, still young and blooming, watching Dots of daughters as they danced at rustic balls; fat Dots, encircled and beset by troops of rosy grandchildren; withered Dots, who leaned on sticks and tottered as they crept along. Old carriers too, appeared, with blind old Boxers lying at their feet; and newer carts with younger drivers ("Peerybingle Brothers" on the tilt); and sick old carriers, tended by the gentlest hands; and graves of dead and gone old carriers, green in the churchyard. And as the cricket showed him all these things—he saw them plainly, though his eyes were fixed upon the fire—the carrier's heart grew light and happy, and he thanked his household gods with all his might, and cared no more for Gruff & Tackleton than you do.

But what was that young figure of a man, which the same fairy cricket set so near her stool, and which remained there singly and alone? Why did it linger still so near her, with its arms upon the chimney-piece, ever repeating "Married! and not to me!"

Oh, Dot! Oh, failing Dot! There is no place for it in all your husband's visions; why has its shadow fallen on his hearth!

CHIRP THE SECOND.

Caleb Plummer and his blind daughter lived all alone by themselves, as the story-books say—and my blessing, with yours to back it, I hope, on the story-books for saying anything in this workaday world!—Caleb Plummer and his blind daughter lived all alone by themselves in a little cracked nutshell of a wooden house, which was in truth no better than a pimple on the prominent red-brick nose of Gruff & Tackleton. The premises of Gruff & Tackleton were the great feature of the street; but you might have knocked down Caleb Plummer's dwelling with a hammer or two, and carried off the pieces in a cart.

If any one had done the dwelling-house of Caleb Plummer the honor to miss it after such an inroad it would have been, no doubt, to commend its demolition as a vast improvement. It stuck to the premises of Gruff & Tackleton like a barnacle to a ship's keel, or a snail to a door, or a little bunch of toadstools to the stem of a tree. But it was the germ from which the full-grown trunk of Gruff & Tackleton had sprung; and under its crazy roof the Gruff before last had in a small way made toys for a generation of old boys and girls, who had played with them, and found them out, and broken them, and gone to sleep.

I have said that Caleb and his poor blind daughter lived here. I should have said that Caleb lived here, and his poor blind daughter somewhere else—in an enchanted home of Caleb's furnishing, where scarcity and shabbiness were not, and trouble never entered. Caleb was no sorcerer, but in the only magic art that still remains to us, the magic of devoted, deathless love, Nature had been the mistress of his study; and from her teaching all the wonder came.

The blind girl never knew that ceilings were discolored, walls blotched and bare of plaster here and there, high crevices unstopped and widening every day, beams moldering and tending downward. The blind girl never knew that iron was rusting, wood rotting, paper peeling off; the size, and shape, and true proportion of the dwelling withering away. The blind girl never knew that ugly shapes of delf and earthenware were on the board; that sorrow and faint-heartedness were in the house; that Caleb's scanty hairs were turning grayer and more gray before her sightless face. The blind girl never knew they had a master, cold, exacting, and uninterested—never knew that Tackleton was Tackleton in short; but lived in the belief of an eccentric humorist who loved to have his jest with them, and who, while he was the guardian angel of their lives, disdained to hear one word of thankfulness.

And all was Caleb's doing; all the doing of her simple father! But he too had a cricket on his hearth; and listening sadly to its music when the motherless blind child was very young, that spirit had inspired him with the thought that even her great deprivation might be almost changed into a blessing, and the girl made happy by these little means. For all the cricket tribe are potent spirits, even though the people who hold converse with them do not know it (which is frequently the case); and there are not in the unseen world voices more gentle and more true that may be so implicity relied on, or that are so certain to give none but tenderest counsel as the voices in which the spirits of the fireside and the hearth address themselves to humankind.

Caleb and his daughter were at work together in their usual working-room, which served them for their ordinary living-room as well; and a strange place it was. There were houses in it, finished and unfinished, for dolls of all stations in life. Suburban tenements for dolls of moderate means; kitchens and single apartments for dolls of the lower classes; capital town residences for dolls of high estate. Some of these establshments were already furnished according to estimate, with a view to the convenience of dolls of limited income; others could be fitted on the most expensive scale at a moment's notice, from whole shelves of chairs and tables, sofas, bedsteads, and upholstery. The nobilty and gentry and public in general, for whose accommodation these tenements were designed, lay here and there in baskets, staring straight up at the ceiling; but in denoting their degrees in society and confining them to their respective stations (which experience shows to be lamentably difficult in real life), the makers of these dolls had far improved on Nature, who is often frowning and perverse: for they, not resting on such arbitrary marks as satin, cotton-print, and bits of rag, had superadded striking personal differences which allowed of no mistake. Thus the doll-lady of distinction had wax limbs of perfect symmetry; but only she and her compeers. The next grade in the social scale being made of leather, and the next of coarse linen stuff. As to the common people, they had just so many matches out of tinder-boxes for their arms and legs, and there they were—established in their sphere at once beyond the possibilty of getting out of it.

There were various other samples of his handicraft besides dolls in Caleb Plummer's room. There were Noah's arks, in which the birds and beasts were an uncommonly tight fit, I assure you; though they could be crammed in anyhow, at the roof, and rattled and shaken into the smallest compass. By a bold poetical license, most of these Noah's arks had knockers on the doors; inconsistent appendages, perhaps, as suggestive of morning callers and a postman, yet a pleasant finish to the outside of the building. There were scores of melancholy little carts which, when the wheels went round, performed most doleful music. Many small fiddles, drums, and other instruments of torture; no end of cannon, shields, swords, spears, and guns. There were little tumblers in red breeches, incessantly swarming up high obstacles of red tape, and coming down head first on the other side; and there were innumerable old gentlemen of respectable, not to say venerable, appearance, insanely flying over horizontal pegs, inserted for the purpose in their own street doors. There were beasts of all sorts: horses, in particular, of every breed, from the spotted barrel on four pegs, with a small tippet for a mane, to the thoroughbred rocker on his highest mettle. As it would have been hard to count the dozens upon dozens of grotesque figures that were ever ready to commit all sorts of absurdities on the turning of a handle, so it would have been no easy task to mention any human folly, vice, or weakness that had not its type, immediate or remote, in Caleb Plummer's room. And not in an exaggerated form, for very little handles will move men and women to as strange performances as any toy was ever made to undertake.

In the midst of all these objects Caleb and his daughter sat at work. The blind girl busy as a doll's dressmaker; Caleb painting and glazing the four pair front of a desirable family mansion.

The care imprinted in the lines of Caleb's face and his absorbed and dreamy manner, which would have sat well on some alchemist or abstruse student, were at first sight an odd contrast to his occupation and the trivialities about him. But trivial things, invented and pursued for bread, become very serious matters of fact; and apart from this consideration, I am not at all prepared to say myself that if Caleb had been a lord chamberlain, or a member of Parliament, or a lawyer, or even a great speculator, he would have dealt in toys one whit less whimsical, while I have a very great doubt whether they would have been as harmless.

"So you were out in the rain last night, father, in your beautiful new great-coat," said Caleb's daughter.

"In my beautiful new great-coat," answered Caleb, glancing toward a clothes-line in the room, on which the sack-cloth garment previously described was carefully hung up to dry.

"How glad I am you bought it, father!"

"And of such a tailor, too," said Caleb. "Quite a fashionable tailor. It's too good for me."

The blind girl rested from her work and laughed with delight. "Too good, father! What can be too good for you?"

"I'm half-ashamed to wear it, though," said Caleb, watching the effect of what he said upon her brightening face; "upon my word! When I hear the boys and people say behind me, 'Hal-loo! Here's a swell!' I don't know which way to look. And when the beggar wouldn't go away last night; and when I said I was a very common man, said 'No, your honor! Bless your honor, don't say that!' I was quite ashamed. I really felt as if I hadn't a right to wear it."

Happy blind girl! How merry she was in her exultation!

"I see you, father," she said, clasping her hands, "as plainly as if I had the eyes I never want when you are with me. A blue coat——"

"Bright blue," said Caleb.

"Yes, yes! Bright blue!" exclaimed the girl, turning up her radiant face; "the color I can just remember in the blessed sky! You told me it was blue before! A bright blue coat——"

"Made loose to the figure," suggested Caleb.

"Made loose to the figure!" cried the blind girl, laughing heartily; "and in it, you, dear father, with your merry eye, your smiling face, your free step, and your dark hair—looking so young and handsome!"

"Halloo! halloo!" said Caleb. "I shall be vain presently!"

"I think you are, already," cried the blind girl, pointing at him in her glee. "I know you, father! Ha! ha! ha! I've found you out, you see!"

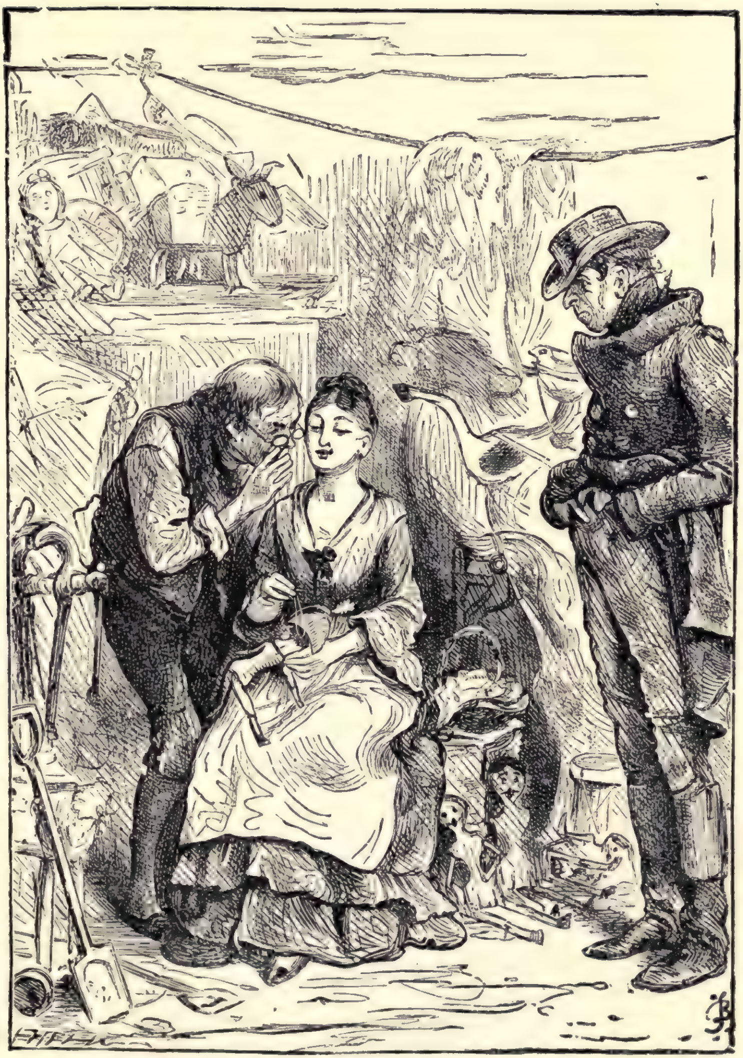
How different the picture in her mind from Caleb as he sat observing her! She had spoken of his free step. She was right in that. For years and years he had never once crossed that threshold at his own slow pace, but with a footfall counterfeited for her ear; and never had he, when his heart was heaviest, forgotten the light tread that was to render hers so cheerful and courageous!

Heaven knows! But I think Caleb's vague bewilderment of manner may have half-originated in his having confused himself about himself and everything around him, for the love of his blind daughter. How could the little man be otherwise than bewildered, after laboring for so many years to destroy his own identity and that of all the objects that had any bearing on it?

"There we are," said Caleb, falling back a pace or two to form the better judgment of his work; "as near the real thing as sixpenn'orth of halfpence is to sixpence. What a pity that the whole front of the house opens at once. If there was only a staircase in it, now, and regular doors to the rooms to go in at! But that's the worst of my calling, I'm always deluding myself and swindling myself."

"You are speaking quite softly. You are not tired, father?"

"Tired!" echoed Caleb with a great burst of animation,



"THE EXTENT TO WHICH HE IS WINKING AT THIS MOMENT!"

C. S.

"what should tire me, Bertha? I was never tired. What does it mean?"

To give the greater force to his words, he checked himself in an involuntary imitation of two half-length stretching and yawning figures on the mantel-shelf, who were represented as in one eternal state of weariness from the waist upward; and hummed a fragment of a song. It was a bacchanalian song, something about a sparkling bowl. He sang it with an assumption of a devil-may-care voice, that made his face a thousand times more meager and more thoughtful than ever.

"What! You're singing, are you?" said Tackleton, putting his head in at the door. "Go it! I can't sing."

Nobody would have suspected him of it. He hadn't what is generally termed a singing face, by any means.

"I can't afford to sing," said Tackleton. "I'm glad you can. I hope you can afford to work too. Hardly time for both, I should think?"

"If you could only see him, Bertha, how he's winking at me!" whispered Caleb. "Such a man to joke! you'd think, if you didn't know him, he was in earnest—wouldn't you now?"

The blind girl smiled and nodded.

"The bird that can sing and won't sing must be made to sing, they say," grumbled Tackleton. "What about the owl that can't sing, and oughtn't to sing, and will sing; is there anything that he should be made to do?"

"The extent to which he's winking at this moment!" whispered Caleb to his daughter. "Oh, my gracious!"

"Always merry and light-hearted with us!" cried the smiling Bertha.

"Oh, you're there, are you?" answered Tackleton. "Poor idiot!"

He really did believe she was an idiot; and he founded the belief, I can't say whether consciously or not, upon her being fond of him.

"Well! and being there—how are you?" said Tackleton in his grudging way.

"Oh! well; quite well. And as happy as even you can wish me to be. As happy as you would make the whole world, if you could!"

"Poor idiot!" muttered Tackleton. "No gleam of reason. Not a gleam!"

The blind girl took his hand and kissed it; held it for a moment in her own two hands; and laid her cheek against it tenderly before releasing it. There was such unspeakable affection and such fervent gratitude in the act that Tackleton himself was moved to say in a milder growl than usual:

"What's the matter now?"

"I stood it close beside my pillow when I went to sleep last night and remembered it in my dreams. And when the day broke, and the glorious red sun—the red sun, father?"

"Red in the mornings and the evenings, Bertha," said poor Caleb with a woeful glance at his employer.

"When it rose, and the bright light I almost fear to strike myself against in walking came into the room, I turned the little tree toward it, and blessed Heaven for making things so precious, and blessed you for sending them to cheer me!"

"Bedlam broke loose!" said Tackleton under his breath. "We shall arrive at the straight-waistcoat and mufflers soon. We're getting on!"

Caleb, with his hands hooked loosely in each other, stared vacantly before him while his daughter spoke, as if he really were uncertain (I believe he was) whether Tackleton had done anything to deserve her thanks or not. If he could have been a perfectly free agent at that moment, required on pain of death to kick the toy merchant or fall at his feet, according to his merits, I believe it would have been an even chance which course he would have taken. Yet Caleb knew that with his own hands he had brought the little rose-tree home for her so carefully, and that with his own lips he had forged the innocent deception which should help her from suspecting how much, how very much he every day denied himself, that she might be the happier.

"Bertha!" said Tackleton, assuming for the nonce a little cordiality. "Come here."

"Oh! I can come straight to you! You needn't guide me!" she rejoined.

"Shall I tell you a secret, Bertha?"

"If you will!" she answered eagerly.

How bright the darkened face! How adorned with light the listening head!

"This is the day on which little what's-her-name, the spoiled child, Peerybingle's wife, pays her regular visit to you—makes her fantastic picnic here; ain't it?" said Tackleton with a strong expression of distaste for the whole concern.

"Yes," replied Bertha. "This is the day."

"I thought so," said Tackleton. "I should like to join the party."

"Do you hear that, father?" cried the blind girl in an ecstasy.

"Yes, yes, I hear it," murmured Caleb with the fixed look of a sleep-walker; "but I don't believe it. It's one of my lies, I've no doubt."

"You see I—I want to bring the Peerybingles a little more into company with May Fielding," said Tackleton. "I am going to be married to May."

"Married!" cried the blind girl, starting from him.

"She's such a con-founded idiot," muttered Tackleton, "that I was afraid she'd never comprehend me. Ah, Bertha! Married! Church, parson, clerk, beadle, glass-coach, bells, breakfast, bride-cake, favors, marrow-bones, cleavers, and all the rest of the tomfoolery. A wedding, you know; a wedding. Don't you know what a wedding is?"

"I know," replied the blind girl in a gentle tone. "I understand!"

"Do you?" muttered Tackleton. "It's more than I expected. Well! On that account I want to join the party, and to bring May and her mother. I'll send in a little something or other before the afternoon. A cold leg of mutton, or some comfortable trifle of that sort. You'll expect me?"

"Yes," she answered.

She had drooped her head and turned away: and so stood, with her hands crossed, musing.

"I don't think you will," muttered Tackleton, looking at her; "for you seem to have forgotten all about it already. Caleb!"

"I may venture to say I'm here, I suppose," thought Caleb. "Sir!"

"Take care she don't forget what I've been saying to her."

"She never forgets," returned Caleb. "It's one of the few things she ain't clever in."

"Every man thinks his own geese swans," observed the toy merchant with a shrug. "Poor devil!"

Having delivered himself of which remark, with infinite contempt, old Gruff & Tackleton withdrew.

Bertha remained where he had left her, lost in meditation. The gayety had vanished from her downcast face, and it was very sad. Three or four times she shook her head as if bewailing some remembrance or some loss; but her sorrowful reflections found no vent in words.

It was not until Caleb had been occupied some time in yoking a team of horses to a wagon by the summary process of nailing the harness to the vital parts of their bodies that she drew near to his working-stool, and sitting down beside him said:

"Father, I am lonely in the dark. I want my eyes, my patient, willing eyes."

"Here they are," said Caleb. "Always ready. They are more yours than mine, Bertha, any hour in the twenty-four. What shall your eyes do for you, dear?"

"Look round the room, father."

"All right," said Caleb. "No sooner said than done, Bertha."

"Tell me about it."

"It's much the same as usual," said Caleb. "Homely, but very snug. The gay colors on the walls; the bright flowers on the plates and dishes; the shining wood, where there are beams or panels; the general cheerfulness and neatness of the building make it very pretty."

Cheerful and neat it was wherever Bertha's hands could busy themselves. But nowhere else were cheerfulness and neatness possible in the old crazy shed which Caleb's fancy so transformed.

"You have your working-dress on, and are not so gallant as when you wear the handsome coat?" said Bertha, touching him.

"Not quite so gallant," answered Caleb. "Pretty brisk, though."

"Father," said the blind girl, drawing close to his side and stealing one arm round his neck, "tell me something about May. She is very fair?"

"She is indeed," said Caleb. And she was indeed. It was quite a rare thing to Caleb not to have to draw on his invention.

"Her hair is dark," said Bertha pensively, "darker than mine. Her voice is sweet and musical, I know. I have often loved to hear it. Her shape——"

"There's not a doll's in all the room to equal it," said Caleb. "And her eyes——"

He stopped; for Bertha had drawn closer round his neck, and from the arm that clung about him came a warning pressure which he understood too well.

He coughed a moment, hammered for a moment, and then fell back upon the song about the sparkling bowl; his infallible resource in all such difficulties.

"Our friend, father, our benefactor. I am never tired, you know, of hearing about him. Now, was I ever?" she said hastily.

"Of course not," answered Caleb, "and with reason!"

"Ah! with how much reason!" cried the blind girl with such fervency that Caleb, though his motives were so pure, could not endure to meet her face; but dropped his eyes as if she could have read in them his innocent deceit.

"Then, tell me again about him, dear father," said Bertha. "Many times again! His face is benevolent, kind, and tender. Honest and true, I am sure it is. The manly heart that tries to cloak all favors with a show of roughness and unwillingness beats in its every look and glance."

"And makes it noble," added Caleb in his quiet desperation.

"And makes it noble!" cried the blind girl. "He is older than May, father."

"Ye-es," said Caleb reluctantly. "He's a little older than May. But that don't signify."

"Oh, father, yes! To be his patient companion in infirmity and age; to be his gentle nurse in sickness and his constant friend in suffering and sorrow; to know no weariness in working for his sake; to watch him, tend him, sit beside his bed and talk to him awake, and pray for him asleep; what privileges these would be! What opportunities for proving all her truth and devotion to him! Would she do all this, dear father?"

"No doubt of it," said Caleb.

"I love her, father; I can love her from my soul!" exclaimed the blind girl. And saying so she laid her poor blind face on Caleb's shoulder and so wept and wept that he was almost sorry to have brought that tearful happiness upon her.

In the mean time there had been a pretty sharp commotion at John Peerybingle's, for little Mrs. Peerybingle naturally couldn't think of going anywhere without the baby; and to get the baby under weigh took time. Not that there was much of the baby, speaking of it as a thing of weight and measure, but there was a vast deal to do for and about it, and it all had to be done by easy stages. For instance, when the baby was got by hook and by crook to a certain point of dressing, and you might have rationally supposed that another touch or two would finish him off and turn him out a tip-top baby challenging the world, he was unexpectedly extinguished in a flannel cap and hustled off to bed; where he simmered (so to speak) between two blankets for the best part of an hour. From this state of inaction he was then recalled, shining very much and roaring violently, to partake of—well, I would rather say, if you'll permit me to speak generally—of a slight repast. After which he went to sleep again. Mrs. Peerybingle took advantage of this interval to make herself as smart in a small way as ever you saw anybody in all your life; and during the same short truce Miss Slowboy insinuated herself into a spencer of a fashion so surprising and ingenious that it had no connection with herself, or anything else in the universe, but was a shrunken, dog's-eared, independent fact, pursuing its lonely course without the least regard to anybody. By this time the baby, being all alive again, was invested by the united efforts of Mrs. Peerybingle and Miss Slowboy with a cream-colored mantle for its body, and a sort of nankeen raised-pie for its head; and so in course of time they all three got down to the door, where the old horse had already taken more than the full value of his day's toll out of the turnpike trust by tearing up the road with his impatient autographs; and whence Boxer might be dimly seen in the remote perspective, standing looking back and tempting him to come on without orders.

As to a chair or anything of that kind for helping Mrs. Peerybingle into the cart, you know very little of John if you think that was necessary. Before you could have seen him lift her from the ground, there she was in her place, fresh and rosy, saying, "John! How can you! Think of Tilly!"

If I might be allowed to mention a young lady's legs, on any terms, I would observe of Miss Slowboy's that there was a fatality about them which rendered them singularly liable to be grazed; and that she never effected the smallest ascent or descent without recording the circumstance upon them with a notch, as Robinson Crusoe marked the days upon his wooden calendar. But as this might be considered ungenteel, I'll think of it.

"John! You've got the basket with the veal and ham pie and things, and the bottles of beer?" said Dot. "If you haven't you must turn round again this very minute."

"You're a nice little article," returned the carrier, "to be talking about turning round after keeping me a full quarter of an hour behind my time."

"I am sorry for it, John," said Dot in a great bustle, "but I really could not think of going to Bertha's—I would not do it, John, on any account—without the veal and ham pie and things, and the bottles of beer. Way!"

This monosyllable was addressed to the horse, who didn't mind it at all.

"Oh, do way, John!" said Mrs. Peerybingle. "Please!"

"It'll be tbe time enough to do that," returned John, "when I begin to leave things behind me. The basket's here safe enough."

"What a hard-hearted monster you must be, John, not to have said so at once, and save me such a turn! I declared I wouldn't go to Bertha's without the veal and ham pie and things and the bottles of beer for any money. Regularly once a fortnight ever since we have been married, John, have we made our little picnic there. If anything was to go wrong with it I should almost think we were never to be lucky again."

"It was a kind thought in the first instance," said the carrier; "and I honor you for it, little woman."

"My dear John," replied Dot, turning very red, "don't talk about honoring me. Good gracious!"

"By the bye," observed the carrier, "that old gentleman——"

Again so visibly and instantly embarrassed!

"He's an odd fish," said the carrier, looking straight along the road before them. "I can't make him out. I don't believe there's any harm in him."

"None at all. I'm—I'm sure there's none at all."

"Yes," said the carrier with his eyes attracted to her face by the great earnestness of her manner. "I am glad you feel so certain of it, because it's a confirmation to me. It's curious that he should have taken it into his head to ask leave to go on lodging with us; ain't it? Things come about so strangely."

"So very strangely," she rejoined in a low voice, scarcely audible.

"However, he's a good-natured old gentleman," said John, "and pays as a gentleman, and I think his word is to be relied upon like a gentleman's. I had quite a long talk with him this morning; he can hear me better already, he says, as he gets more used to my voice. He told me a great deal about himself, and I told him a good deal about myself, and a rare lot of questions he asked me. I gave him information about my having two beats, you know, in my business; one day to the right from our house and back again; another day to the left from our house and back again (for he's a stranger and don't know the names of places about here); and he seemed quite pleased. 'Why, then I shall be returning home to-night your way,' he says, 'when I thought you'd be coming in an exactly opposite direction. That's capital! I may trouble you for another lift perhaps, but I'll engage not to fall so sound asleep again.' He was sound asleep, surely! Dot! what are you thinking of?'

"Thinking of, John? I—I was listening to you."

"Oh! That's all right!" said the honest carrier. "I was afraid from the look of your face that I had gone rambling on so long as to set you thinking about something else. I was very near it, I'll be bound."

Dot making no reply, they jogged on for some little time in silence. But it was not easy to remain silent very long in John Peerybingle's cart, for everybody on the road had something to say. Though it might only be "How are you?" and indeed it was very often nothing else, still, to give that back again in the right spirit of cordiailty required not merely a nod and a smile, but as wholesome an action of the lungs withal as a long-winded parliamentary speech. Sometimes passengers on foot or horseback plodded on a little way beside the cart, for the express purpose of having a chat; and then there was a great deal to be said on both sides.

Then Boxer gave occasion to more good-natured recognitions of and by the carrier than half a dozen Christians could have done! Everybody knew him all along the road—especially the fowls and pigs, who when they saw him approaching, with his body all on one side, and his ears pricked up inquisitively, and that knob of a tail making the most of itself in the air, immediately withdrew into remote back settlements without waiting for the honor of a nearer acquaintance. He had business everywhere; going down all the turnings, looking into all the wells, bolting in and out of all the cottages, dashing into the midst of all the dame-schools, fluttering all the pigeons, magnifying the tails of all the cats, and trotting into the public-houses like a regular customer. Wherever he went somebody or other might have been heard to cry, "Halloo! Here's Boxer!" and out came that somebody forthwith, accompanied by at least two or three other somebodies, to give John Peerybingle and his pretty wife good-day.

The packages and parcels for the errand cart were numerous; and there were many stoppages to take them in and give them out, which were not by any means the worst parts of the journey. Some people were so full of expectation about their parcels, and other people were so full of wonder about their parcels, and other people were so full of inexhaustible directions about their parcels, and John had such a lively interest in all the parcels that it was as good as a play. Likewise there were articles to carry, which required to be considered and discussed, and in reference to the adjustment and disposition of which councils had to be holden by the carrier and the senders: at which Boxer usually assisted, in short fits of the closest attention, and long fits of tearing round and round the assembled sages and barking himself hoarse. Of all these little incidents, Dot was the amused and open-eyed spectatress from her chair in the cart; and as she sat there, looking on—a charming little portrait framed to admiration by the tilt—there was no lack of nudgings and glancings and whisperings and envyings among the younger men. And this delighted John the carrier beyond measure; for he was proud to have his little wife admired, knowing that she didn't mind it—that, if anything, she rather liked it.

The trip was a little foggy, to be sure, in the January weather; and was raw and cold. But who cared for such trifles? Not Dot, decidedly. Not Tilly Slowboy, for she deemed sitting in a cart, on any terms, to be the highest point of human joys; the crowning circumstance of earthly hopes. Not the baby, I'll be sworn; for it's not in baby nature to be warmer or more sound asleep, though its capacity is great in both respects, than that blessed young Peerybingle was all the way.

You couldn't see very far in the fog, of course; but you could see a great deal! It's astonishing how much you may see in a thicker fog than that, if you will only take the trouble to look for it. Why, even to sit watching for the fairy-rings in the fields and for the patches of hoar-frost still lingering in the shades near hedges and by trees was a pleasant occupation: to make no mention of the unexpected shapes in which the trees themselves came starting out of the mist and glided into it again. The hedges were tangled and bare, and waved a multitude of blighted garlands in the wind; but there was no discouragement in this. It was agreeable to contemplate; for it made the fireside warmer in possession and the summer greener in expectancy. The river looked chilly; but it was in motion, and moving at a good pace—which was a great point. The canal was rather slow and torpid; that must be admitted. Never mind. It would freeze the sooner when the frost set fairly in, and then there would be skating and sliding; and the heavy old barges, frozen up somewhere near a wharf, would smoke their rusty iron chimney pipes all day, and have a lazy time of it.

In one place there was a great mound of weeds or stubble burning; and they watched the fire, so white in the daytime, flaring through the fog, with only here and there a dash of red in it, until, in consequence as she observed of the smoke "getting up her nose," Miss Slowboy choked--she could do anything of that sort on the smallest provocation—and woke the baby, who wouldn't go to sleep again. But Boxer, who was in advance some quarter of a mile or so, had already passed the outposts of the town, and gained the corner of the street where Caleb and his daughter lived; and long before they had reached the door he and the blind girl were on the pavement waiting to receive them.

Boxer, by the way, made certain delicate distinctions of his own in his communications with Bertha, which persuade me fully that he knew her to be blind. He never sought to attract her attention by looking at her as he often did with other people, but touched her invariably. What experience he could ever have had of blind people or blind dogs, I don't know. He had never lived with a blind master; nor had Mr. Boxer the elder, nor Mrs. Boxer, nor any of his respectable family on either side ever been visited with blindness that I am aware of. He may have found it out for himself, perhaps, but he had got hold of it somehow; and therefore he had hold of Bertha too, by the skirt, and kept hold until Mrs. Peerybingle and the baby, and Miss Slowboy, and the basket were all got safely within doors.

May Fielding was already come; and so was her mother—a little querulous chip of an old lady with a peevish face, who, in right of having preserved a waist like a bedpost, was supposed to be a most transcendent figure; and who, in consequence of having once been better off, or of laboring under an impression that she might have been if something had happened which never did happen, and seemed to have never been particularly likely to come to pass—but it's all the same—was very genteel and patronizing indeed. Gruff & Tackleton was also there, doing the agreeable with the evident sensation of being as perfectly at home and as unquestionably in his own element as a fresh young salmon on the top of the Great Pyramid.

"May! My dear old friend!" cried Dot, running to meet her. "What a happiness to see you!"

Her old friend was to the full as hearty and as glad as she; and it really was, if you'll believe me, quite a pleasant sight to see them embrace. Tackleton was a man of taste, beyond all question. May was very pretty.

You know sometimes, when you are used to a pretty face, how, when it comes into contact and comparison with another pretty face, it seems for the moment to be homely and faded, and hardly to deserve the high opinion you have had of it. Now, this was not at all the case, either with Dot or May; for May's face set off Dot's, and Dot's face set off May's, so naturally and agreeably that, as John Peerybingle was very near saying when he came into the room, they ought to have been born sisters—which was the only improvement you could have suggested.

Tackleton had brought his leg of mutton, and wonderful to relate, a tart besides—but we don't mind a little dissipation when our brides are in the case; we don't get married every day—and in addition to these dainties there were the veal and ham pie, and "things," as Mrs. Peerybingle called them; which were chiefly nuts and oranges, and cakes, and such small beer. When the repast was set forth on the board, flanked by Caleb's contribution, which was a great wooden bowl of smoking potatoes (he was prohibited by solemn compact from producing any other viands), Tackleton led his intended mother-in-law to the post of honor. For the better gracing of this place at the high festival the majestic old soul had adorned herself with a cap calculated to inspire the thoughtless with sentiments of awe. She also wore her gloves. But let us be genteel or die!

Caleb sat next his daughter; Dot and her old schoolfellow were side by side; the good carrier took care of the bottom of the table. Miss Slowboy was isolated for the time being from every article of furniture but the chair she sat on, that she might have nothing else to knock the baby's head against.

As Tilly stared about her at the dolls and toys they stared at her and at the company. The venerable old gentlemen at the street door (who were all in full action) showed especial interest in the party, pausing occasionally before leaping, as if they were listening to the conversation, and then plunging wildly over and over a great many times without halting for breath—as in a frantic state of delight with the whole proceedings.

Certainly if these old gentlemen were inclined to have a fiendish joy in the contemplation of Tackleton's discomfiture, they had good reason to be satisfied. Tackleton couldn't get on at all; and the more cheerful his intended bride became in Dot's society the less he liked it, though he had brought them together for that purpose. For he was a regular dog in the manger, was Tackleton; and when they laughed and he couldn't, he took it into his head immediately that they must be laughing at him.

"Ah, May!" said Dot. "Dear, dear, what changes! To talk of those merry school-days makes one young again."

"Why, you ain't particularly old at any time; are you?" said Tackleton.

"Look at my sober plodding husband there," returned Dot. "He adds twenty years to my age at least. Don't you, John?"

"Forty," John replied.

"How many you'll add to May's, I am sure I don't know," said Dot, laughing. "But she can't be much less than a hundred years of age on her next birthday."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Tackleton. Hollow as a drum, that laugh, though. And he looked as if he could have twisted Dot's neck comfortably.

"Dear! dear!" said Dot. "Only to remember how we used to talk at school about the husbands we would choose. I don't know how young, and how handsome, and how gay, and how lively mine was not to be! And as to May's! Ah, dear! I don't know whether to laugh or cry when I think what silly girls we were."

May seemed to know which to do; for the color flushed into her face and tears stood in her eyes.

"Even the very persons themselves—real live young men—were fixed on sometimes," said Dot. "We little thought how things would come about. I never fixed on John, I'm sure; I never so much as thought of him. And if I had told you you were ever to be married to Mr. Tackleton, why, you'd have slapped me. Wouldn't you, May?"

Though May didn't say yes, she certainly didn't say no, or express no, by any means.

Tackleton laughed—quite shouted, he laughed so loud. John Peerybingle laughed too, in his ordinary good-natured and contented manner; but his was a mere whisper of a laugh to Tackleton's.

"You couldn't help yourselves, for all that. You couldn't resist us, you see," said Tackleton. "Here we are! Here we are! Where are your gay young bridegrooms now?"

"Some of them are dead," said Dot; "and some of them forgotten. Some of them, if they could stand among us at this moment, would not believe we were the same creatures; would not believe that what they saw and heard was real, and we could forget them so. No! they would not believe one word of it!"

"Why, Dot!" exclaimed the carrier. "Little woman!"

She had spoken with such earnestness and fire that she stood in need of some recalling to herself without doubt. Her husband's check was very gentle, for he merely interfered, as he supposed, to shield old Tackleton; but it proved effectual, for she stopped and said no more. There was an uncommon agitation, even in her silence, which the wary Tackleton, who had brought his half-shut eye to bear upon her, noted closely and remembered to some purpose too.

May uttered no word, good or bad, but sat quite still, with her eyes cast down, and made no sign of interest in what had passed. The good lady her mother now interposed, observing, in the first instance, that girls were girls, and bygones bygones, and that so long as young people were young and thoughtless they would probably conduct themselves like young and thoughtless persons: with two or three other positions of a no less sound and incontrovertible character. She then remarked in a devout spirit that she thanked Heaven she had always found in her daughter May a beautiful and obedient child; for which she took no credit to herself, though she had every reason to believe it was entirely owing to herself. With regard to Mr. Tackleton, she said, that he was in a moral point of view an undeniable individual, and that he was in an eligible point of view a son-in-law to be desired, no one in their senses could doubt. (She was very emphatic here.) With regard to the family into which he was so soon about, after some solicitation, to be admitted, she believed Mr. Tackleton knew that, although reduced in purse, it had some pretensions to gentility; and if certain circumstances, not wholly unconnected, she would go so far as to say, with the indigo trade, but to which she would not more particularly refer, had happened differently, it might perhaps have been in possession of wealth. She then remarked that she would not allude to the past, and would not mention that her daughter had for some time rejected the suit of Mr. Tackleton; and that she would not say a great many other things which she did say at great length. Finally, she delivered it as the general result of her observation and experience, that those marriages in which there was least of what was romantically and sillily called love were always the happiest; and that she anticipated the greatest possible amount of bliss—not rapturous bliss; but the solid, steady-going article—from the approaching nuptials. She concluded by informing the company that to-morrow was the day she had lived for expressly; and that when it was over she would desire nothing better than to be packed up and disposed of in any genteel place of burial.

As these remarks were quite unanswerable—which is the happy property of all remarks that are sufficiently wide of the purpose—they changed the current of the conversation and diverted the general attention to the veal and ham pie, the cold mutton, the potatoes, and the tart. In order that the bottled beer might not be slighted, John Peerybingle proposed "To-morrow: the Wedding-Day," and called upon them to drink a bumper to it before he proceeded on his journey.

For you ought to know that he only rested there, and gave the old horse a bait. He had to go some four or five miles further on; and when he returned in the evening he called for Dot, and took another rest on his way home. This was the order of the day on all the picnic occasions, and had been ever since their institution.

There were two persons present besides the bride and bridegroom-elect who did but indifferent honor to the toast. One of these was Dot, too flushed and discomposed to adapt herself to any small occurrence of the moment; the other Bertha, who rose up hurriedly before the rest and left the table.

"Good-by!" said stout John Peerybingle, pulling on his dreadnaught coat. "I shall be back at the old time. Good-by all!"

"Good-by, John," returned Caleb.

He seemed to say it by rote, and to wave his hand in the same unconscious manner; for he stood observing Bertha with an anxious, wondering face, that never altered its expression.

"Good-by, young shaver!" said the jolly carrier, bending down to kiss the child; which Tilly Slowboy, now intent upon her knife and fork, had deposited asleep (and strange to say, without damage) in a little cot of Bertha's furnishing; "good-by! Time will come, I suppose, when you'll turn out into the cold, my little friend, and leave your old father to enjoy his pipe and his rheumatics in the chimney-corner; eh? Where's Dot?"

"I'm here, John!" she said, starting.

"Come! come!" returned the carrier, clapping his sounding hands. "Where's the pipe?"

"I quite forgot the pipe, John."

Forgot the pipe! Was such a wonder ever heard of! She! Forgot the pipe!

"I'll—I'll fill it directly. It's soon done."

But it was not so soon done, either. It lay in the usual place—the carrier's dreadnaught pocket—with the little pouch, her own work, from which she was used to fill it; but her hand shook so that she entangled it (and yet her hand was small enough to have come out easily, I am sure) and bungled terribly. The filling of the pipe and lighting it, those little offices in which I have commended her discretion, were vilely done from first to last. During the whole process, Tackleton stood looking on maliciously with the half-closed eye; which, whenever it met hers—or caught it, for it can hardly be said to have ever met another eye: rather being a kind of trap to snatch it up—augmented her confusion in a most remarkable degree.

"Why, what a clumsy Dot you are this afternoon!" said John. "I could have done it better myself, I verily believe!"

With these good-natured words he strode away and presently was heard, in company with Boxer and the old horse and the cart, making lively music down the road. What time the dreamy Caleb still stood watching his blind daughter with the same expression on his face.

"Bertha!" said Caleb softly. "What has happened? How changed you are, my darling, in a few hours—since this morning. You silent and dull all day! What is it? Tell me!"

"Oh, father! father!" cried the blind girl, bursting into tears. "Oh, my hard, hard fate!"

Caleb drew his hand across his eyes before he answered her.

"But think how cheerful and how happy you have been, Bertha! How good, and how much loved by many people."

"That strikes me to the heart, dear father! Always so mindful of me! Always so kind to me!"

Caleb was very much perplexed to understand her.

"To be—to be blind, Bertha, my poor dear," he faltered, "is a great affliction; but——"

"I have never felt it!" cried the blind girl. "I have never felt it in its fullness. Never! I have sometimes wished that I could see you, or could see him—only once, dear father, only for one little minute—that I might know what it is I treasure up," she laid her hands upon her breast, "and hold here! That I might be sure and have it right! And sometimes (but then I was a child) I have wept in my prayers at night, to think that when your images ascended from my heart to heaven, they might not be the true resemblance of yourselves. But I have never had these feelings long. They have passed away and left me tranquil and contented."

"And they will again," said Caleb.

"But, father! Oh, my good, gentle father, bear with me if I am wicked!" said the blind girl. "This is not the sorrow that so weighs me down!"

Her father could not choose but let his moist eyes overflow; she was so earnest and pathetic, but he did not understand her yet.

"Bring her to me," said Bertha. "I cannot hold it closed and shut within myself. Bring her to me, father!"

She knew he hesitated, and said, "May. Bring May!"

May heard the mention of her name, and coming quietly toward her touched her on the arm. The blind girl turned immediately and held her by both hands.

"Look into my face. Dear heart, sweet heart!" said Bertha. "Read it with your beautiful eyes, and tell me if the truth is written on it."

"Dear Bertha, yes!'

The blind girl, still upturning the blank sightless face, down which the tears were coursing fast, addressed her in these words:

"There is not in my soul a wish or thought that is not for your good, bright May! There is not in my soul a grateful recollection stronger than the deep remembrance which is stored there of the many, many times when, in the full pride of sight and beauty, you have had consideration for blind Bertha, even when we two were children, or when Bertha was as much a child as ever blindness can be! Every blessing on your head! Light upon your happy course! Not the less, my dear May," and she drew toward her in a closer grasp, "not the less, my bird, because to-day the knowledge that you are to be his wife has wrung my heart almost to breaking! Father! May! Mary! oh, forgive me that it is so, for the sake of all he has done to relieve the weariness of my dark life: and for the sake of the belief you have in me when I call Heaven to witness that I could not wish him married to a wife more worthy of his goodness!"

While speaking she had released May Fielding's hands, and clasped her garments in an attitude of mingled supplication and love. Sinking lower and lower down as she proceeded in her strange confession, she dropped at last at the feet of her friend and hid her blind face in the folds of her dress.

"Great power!" exclaimed her father, smitten at one blow with the truth, "have I deceived her from her cradle but to break her heart at last!"

It was well for all of them that Dot, that beaming, useful, busy little Dot—for such she was, whatever faults she had, and however you may learn to hate her in good time—it was well for all of them, I say, that she was there: or where this would have ended, it were hard to tell. But Dot, recovering her self-possession, interposed before May could reply or Caleb say another word.

"Come, come, dear Bertha! come away with me! Give her your arm, May. So! How composed she is, you see, already; and how good it is of her to mind us," said the cheery little woman, kissing her upon the forehead. "Come away, dear Bertha. Come! and here's her good father will come with her; won't you, Caleb? To—be—sure!"

Well! well! she was a noble little Dot in such things, and it must have been an obdurate nature that could have withstood her influence. When she had got poor Caleb and his Bertha away, that they might comfort and console each other, as she knew they only could, she presently came bouncing back—the saying is, as fresh as any daisy; I say fresher—to mount guard over that bridling little piece of consequence in the cap and gloves, and prevent the dear old creature from making discoveries.

"So bring me the precious baby, Tilly," said she, drawing a chair to the fire; "and while I have it in my lap, here's Mrs. Fielding, Tilly, will tell me all about the management of babies, and put me right in twenty points where I'm as wrong as can be. Won't you, Mrs. Fielding?"

Not even the Welsh giant, who according to the popular expression was so "slow" as to perform a fatal surgical operation upon himself, in emulation of a juggling trick achieved by his arch-enemy at breakfast-time; not even he fell half so readily into the snare prepared for him as the old lady did into this artful pitfall. The fact of Tackleton having walked out, and furthermore, of two or three people having been talking together at a distance for two minutes, leaving her to her own resources, was quite enough to have put her on her dignity and the bewailment of that mysterious convulsion in the indigo trade for twenty-four hours. But this becoming deference to her experience on the part of the young mother was so irresistible that after a short affectation of humility she began to enlighten her with the best grace in the world; and sitting bolt upright before the wicked Dot, she did in half an hour deliver more infallible domestic recipes and precepts than would (if acted on) have utterly destroyed and done up that young Peerybingle, though he had been an infant Sampson.

To change the theme, Dot did a little needlework—she carried the contents of a whole workbox in her pocket; however she contrived it, I don't know—then did a little nursing; then a little more needlework; then had a little whispering chat with May while the old lady dozed; and so in little bits of bustle, which was quite her manner always, found it a very short afternoon. Then, as it grew dark, and as it was a solemn part of this institution of the picnic that she should perform all Bertha's household tasks, she trimmed the fire, and swept the hearth, and set the tea-board out, and drew the curtain, and lighted a candle. Then she played an air or two on a rude kind of harp which Caleb had contrived for Bertha, and played them very well; for Nature had made her delicate little ear as choice a one for music as it would have been for jewels, if she had had any to wear. By this time it was the established hour for having tea; and

Tackleton came back again to share the meal and spend the evening.

Caleb and Bertha had returned some time before, and Caleb had sat down to his afternoon's work. But he couldn't settle to it, poor fellow, being anxious and remorseful for his daughter. It was touching to see him sitting idle on his working-stool, regarding her so wistfully, and always saying in his face, "Have I deceived her from her cradle but to break her heart?"

When it was night, and tea was done, and Dot had nothing more to do in washing up the cups and saucers; in a word—for I must come to it, and there is no use in putting it off—when the time drew nigh for expecting the carrier's return in every sound of distant wheels, her manner changed again, her color came and went, and she was very restless. Not as good wives are when listening for their husbands. No, no, no. It was another sort of restlessness from that.

Wheels heard. A horse's feet. The barking of a dog. The gradual approach of all the sounds. The scratching paw of Boxer at the door!

"Whose step is that?" cried Bertha, starting up.

"Whose step?" returned the carrier, standing in the portal, with his brown face ruddy as a winter berry from the keen night air. "Why, mine."

"The other step," said Bertha. "The man's tread behind you!"

"She is not to be deceived," observed the carrier, laughing. "Come along, sir. You'll be welcome, never fear!"

He spoke in a loud tone; and as he spoke the deaf old gentleman entered.

"He's not so much of a stranger that you haven't seen him once, Caleb," said the carrier. "You'll give him house-room till we go?"

"Oh, surely, John, and take it as an honor."

"He's the best company on earth to talk secrets in," said John. "I have reasonably good lungs, but he tries 'em, I can tell you. Sit down, sir. All friends here, and glad to see you!"

When he had imparted this assurance in a voice that amply corroborated what he had said about his lungs he added in his natural tone, "A chair in the chimney-corner, and leave to sit quite silent and look pleasantly about him, is all he cares for. He's easily pleased."

Bertha had been listening intently. She called Caleb to her side, when he had set the chair, and asked him in a low voice to describe their visitor. When he had done so (truly now; with scrupulous fidelity), she moved for the first time since he had come in, and sighed, and seemed to have no further interest concerning him.

The carrier was in high spirits, good fellow that he was, and fonder of his little wife than ever.

"A clumsy Dot she was this afternoon!" he said, encircling her with his rough arm as she stood removed from the rest; "and yet I like her somehow. See yonder, Dot!"

He pointed to the old man. She looked down. I think she trembled.

"He's—ha! ha! ha!—he's full of admiration for you!" said the carrier. "Talked of nothing else the whole way here. Why, he's a brave old boy. I like him for it!"

"I wish he had had a better subject, John," she said, with an uneasy glance about the room. At Tackleton especially.

"A better subject!" cried the jovial John. "There's no such thing. Come, off with the great-coat, off with the thick shawl, off with the heavy wrappers! and a cozy half-hour by the fire! My humble service, mistress. A game at cribbage, you and I? That's hearty. The cards and board, Dot. And a glass of beer here, if there's any left, small wife!"

His challenge was addressed to the old lady, who accepting it with gracious readiness, they were soon engaged upon the game. At first the carrier looked about him sometimes with a smile, or now and then called Dot to peep over his shoulder at his hand, and advise him on some knotty point. But his adversary being a rigid disciplinarian, and subject to an occasional weakness in respect of pegging more than she was entitled to, required such vigilance on his part as left him neither eyes nor ears to spare. Thus his whole attention gradually became absorbed upon the cards; and he thought of nothing else until a hand upon his shoulder restored him to a consciousness of Tackleton.

"I am sorry to disturb you—but a word, directly."

"I'm going to deal," returned the carrier. "It's a crisis.

"It is," said Tackleton. "Come here, man!"

There was that in his pale face which made the other rise immediately and ask him in a hurry what the matter was.

"Hush! John Peerybingle," said Tackleton. "I am sorry for this. I am indeed. I have been afraid of it. I have suspected it from the first."

"What is it?" asked the carrier with a frightened aspect.

"Hush! I'll show you if you'll come with me."

The carrier accompanied him without another word. They went across a yard, where the stars were shining, and by a little side door into Tackleton's own counting-house, where there was a glass window commanding the wareroom, which was closed for the night. There was no light in the counting-house itself, but there were lamps in the long narrow wareroom; and consequently the window was bright.

"A moment!" said Tackleton. "Can you bear to look through that window, do you think?"

"Why not?" returned the carrier.

"A moment more," said Tackleton. "Don't commit any violence. It's of no use. It's dangerous too. You're a strong-made man; and you might do murder before you know it."

The carrier looked him in the face and recoiled a step as if he had been struck. In one stride he was at the window, and he saw——

O shadow on the hearth! O truthful cricket! O perfidious wife!

He saw her with the old man—old no longer, but erect and gallant—bearing in his hand the false white hair that had won his way into their desolate and miserable home. He saw her listening to him as he bent his head to whisper in her ear; and suffering him to clasp her round the waist as they moved slowly down the long wooden gallery toward the door by which they had entered it. He saw them stop and saw her turn—to have the face, the face he loved so, so presented to his view!—and saw her with her own hands adjust the lie upon his head, laughing as she did it at his unsuspicious nature!

He clinched his strong righthand at first as if he would have beaten down a lion. But opening it immediately again, he spread it out before the eyes of Tackleton (for he was tender of her even then), and so as they passed out fell down upon a desk, and was as weak as any infant.

He was wrapped up to the chin, and busy with his horse and parcels when she came into the room, prepared for going home.

"Now, John dear! Good-night, May! Good-night, Bertha!"

Could she kiss them? Could she be blithe and cheerful in her parting? Could she venture to reveal her face to them without a blush? Yes. Tackleton observed her closely, and she did all this.

Tilly was hushing the baby, and she crossed and recrossed Tackleton a dozen times, repeating drowsily:

"Did the knowledge that it was to be its wifes, then, wring its hearts almost to breaking; and did its fathers deceive it from its cradles but to break its hearts at last!"

"Now, Tilly, give me the baby! Good-night, Mr. Tackleton. Where's John, for goodness' sake?"

"He's going to walk beside the horse's head," said Tackleton, who helped her to her seat.

"My dear John. Walk? To-night?"

The muffled figure of her husband made a hasty sign in the affirmative; and the false stranger and the little nurse being in their places the old horse moved off. Boxer, the unconscious Boxer, running on before, running back, running round and round the cart, and barking as triumphantly and merrily as ever.

When Tackleton had gone off likewise, escorting May and her mother home, poor Caleb sat down by the fire beside his daughter; anxious and remorseful at the core; and still saying in his wistful contemplation of her, "Have I deceived her from her cradle but to break her heart at last?"

The toys that had been set in motion for the baby had all stopped and run down long ago. In the faint light and silence the imperturbably calm dolls, the agitated rocking-horses with distended eyes and nostrils, the old gentlemen at the street-doors, standing half-doubled-up upon their failing knees and ankles, the wry-faced nutcrackers, the very beasts upon their way into the ark in twos, like a boarding-school out walking, might have been imagined to be stricken motionless with fantastic wonder at Dot being false, or Tackleton beloved under any combination of circumstances.

CHIRP THE THIRD.

THE Dutch clock in the corner struck ten when the carrier sat down by his fireside. So troubled and grief worn that he seemed to scare the cuckoo, who, having cut his ten melodious announcements as short as possible, plunged back into the Moorish palace again and clapped his little door behind him as if the unwonted spectacle were too much for his feelings.

If the little haymaker had been armed with the sharpest of scythes, and had cut at every stroke into the carrier's heart, he never could have gashed and wounded it as Dot had done.

It was a heart so full of love for her; so bound up and held together by innumerable threads of winning remembrance, spun from the daily workings of her many qualities of endearments; it was a heart in which she had enshrined herself so gently and so closely; a heart so single and so earnest in its truth, so strong in right, so weak in wrong; that it could cherish neither passion nor revenge at first, and had only room to hold the broken image of its idol.

But slowly, slowly, as the carrier sat brooding on his hearth, now cold and dark, other and fiercer thoughts began to rise within him as an angry wind comes rising in the night. The stranger was beneath his outraged roof. Three steps would take him to his chamber-door. One blow would beat it in. "You might do murder before you know it," Tackleton had said. How could it be murder if he gave the villain time to grapple with him hand to hand? He was the younger man.

It was an ill-timed thought, bad for the dark mood of his mind. It was an angry thought, goading him to some avenging act that should change the cheerful house into a haunted place which lonely travelers would dread to pass by night; and where the timid would see shadows struggling in the ruined windows when the moon was dim, and hear wild noises in the stormy weather.

He was the younger man! Yes, yes; some lover who had won the heart that he had never touched. Some lover of her early choice, of whom she had thought and dreamed, for whom she had pined and pined, when he had fancied her so happy by his side. Oh, agony, to think of it!

She had been above stairs with the baby, getting it to bed. As he sat brooding on the hearth she came close beside him, without his knowledge—in the turning of the rack of his great misery he lost all other sounds—and put her little stool at his feet. He only knew it when he felt her hand upon his own and saw her looking up into his face.

With wonder? No. It was his first impression, and he was fain to look at her again to set it right. No, not with wonder. With an eager and inquiring look; but not with wonder. At first it was alarmed and serious; then it changed into a strange, wild, dreadful smile of recognition of his thoughts; then there was nothing but her clasped hands on her brow, and her bent head, and falling hair.

Though the power of omnipotence had been his to wield at that moment, he had too much of its diviner property of mercy in his breast to have turned one feather's weight of it against her. But he could not bear to see her crouching down upon the little seat where he had often looked on her with love and pride, so innocent and gay; and when she rose and left him, sobbing as she went, he felt it a relief to have the vacant place beside him rather than her so long-cherished presence. This in itself was anguish keene than all, reminding him how desolate he was become, and how the great bond of his life was rent asunder.

The more he felt this, and the more he knew he could have better borne to see her lying prematurely dead before him with their little child upon her breast, the higher and the stronger rose his wrath against his enemy. He looked about him for a weapon.

There was a gun hanging on the wall. He took it down, and moved a pace or two toward the door of the perfidious stranger's room. He knew the gun was loaded.

Some shadowy idea that it was just to shoot this man like a wild beast seized him and dilated in his mind until it grew into a monstrous demon in complete possession of him, casting out all milder thoughts and setting up its undivided empire.

That phrase is wrong. Not casting out his milder thoughts, but artfully transforming them. Changing them into scourges to drive him on. Turning water into blood, love into hate, gentleness into blind ferocity. Her image, sorrowing, humbled, but still pleading to his tenderness and mercy with resistless power, never left his mind; but, staying there, it urged him to the door; raised the weapon to his shoulder; fitted and nerved his finger to the trigger; and cried "Kill him! In his bed!"

He reversed the gun to beat the stock upon the door; he already held it lifted in the air; some indistinct design was in his thoughts of calling out to him to fly, for God's sake, by the window——

When, suddenly, the struggling fire illumined the whole chimney with a glow of light; and the cricket on the hearth began to chirp!

No sound he could have heard, no human voice, not even hers, could so have moved and softened him. The artless words in which she had told him of her love for this same cricket were once more freshly spoken; her trembling, earnest manner at the moment was again before him; her pleasant voice—oh, what a voice it was for making household music at the fireside of an honest man!—thrilled through and through his better nature, and awoke it into life and action.

He recoiled from the door like a man walking in his sleep, awakened from a frightful dream: and put the gun aside. Clasping his hands before his face, he then sat down again beside the fire and found relief in tears.

The cricket on the hearth came out into the room and stood in fairy shape before him.

"'I love it,'" said the fairy voice, repeating what he well remembered, "'for the many times I have heard it, and the many thoughts its harmless music has given me.'"

"She said so!" cried the carrier. "True!"

"'This has been a happy home, John: and I love the cricket for its sake!'"

"It has been, Heaven knows," returned the carrier. "She made it happy always—until now."

"So gracefully sweet-tempered, so domestic, joyful, busy, and light-hearted!" said the voice.

"Otherwise I never could have loved her as I did," returned the carrier. The voice, correcting him, said "do."

The carrier repeated "as I did." But not firmly. His faltering tongue resisted his control, and would speak in its own way, for itself and him.

The figure in an atitude of invocation raised its head and said:

"Upon your own hearth——"

"The hearth she has blighted," interposed the carrier.

"The hearth she has—how often!—blessed and brightened," said the cricket; "the hearth which, but for her, were only a few stones and bricks and rusty bars, but which has been, through her, the altar of your home; on which you have nightly sacrificed some petty passion, selfishness, or care, and offered up the homage of a tranquil mind, a trusting nature, and an overflowing heart; so that the smoke from this poor chimney has gone upward with a better fragrance than the richest incense that is burned before the richest shrines in all the gaudy temples of this world! Upon your own hearth; in its quiet sanctuary; surrounded by its gentle influences and associations; hear her! Hear me! Hear everything that speaks the language of your hearth and home!"

"And pleads for her?" inquired the carrier.

"All things that speak the language of your hearth and home must plead for her!" returned the cricket. "For they speak the truth."

And while the carrier, with his head upon his hands, continued to sit meditating in his chair, the presence stood beside him, suggesting his reflections by its power, and presenting them before him as in a glass or picture. It was not a solitary presence. From the hearthstone, from the chimney, from the clock, the pipe, the kettle, and the cradle; from the floor, the ceiling, and the stairs; from the cart without, and the cupboard within, and the household implements; from everything and every place with which she had ever been familiar, and with which she had ever entwined one recollection of herself in her unhappy husband's mind, fairies came trooping forth.

Not to stand beside him as the cricket did, but to busy and bestir themselves To do all honor to her image. To pull him by the skirts and point to it when it appeared. To cluster round it, and embrace it, and strew flowers for it to tread on. To try to crown its fair head with their tiny hands. To show that they were fond of it and loved it; and that there was not one ugly, wicked, or accusatory creature to claim knowledge of it—none but their playful and approving selves.

His thoughts were constant to her image. It was always there.

She sat plying her needle before the fire and singing to herself. Such a blithe, thriving, steady little Dot! The fairy figures turned upon him all at once by one consent with one prodigious concentrated stare, and seemed to say, "Is this the light wife you are mourning for?"

There were sounds of gayety outside, musical instruments, and noisy tongues, and laughter. A crowd of young merry-makers came pouring in, among whom were May Fielding and a score of pretty girls. Dot was the fairest of them all; as young as any of them too. They came to summon her to join their party. It was a dance. If ever little foot were made for dancing, hers was, surely. But she laughed, and shook her head, and pointed to her cookery on the fire, and her table ready spread: with an exulting defiance that rendered her more charming than she was before. And so she merrily dismissed them, nodding to her would-be partners one by one as they passed, but with a comical indifference enough to make them go and drown themselves immediately if they were her admirers—and they must have been so, more or less; they couldn't help it. And yet indifference was not her character. Oh, no! For presently there came a certain carrier to the door; and bless her what a welcome she bestowed upon him!

Again the staring figures turned upon him all at once, and seemed to say, "Is this the wife who has forsaken you!"

A shadow fell upon the mirror or the picture; call it what you will. A great shadow of the stranger as he first stood underneath their roof; covering its surface, and blotting out all other objects. But the nimble fairies worked like bees to clear it off again. And Dot again was there. Still bright and beautiful.

Rocking her little baby in its cradle, singing to it softly, and resting her head upon a shoulder which had its counterpart in the musing figure by which the fairy cricket stood.

The night—I mean the real night: not going by fairy clocks—was wearing now; and in this stage of the carrier's thoughts the moon burst out and shone brightly in the sky. Perhaps some calm and quiet light had risen also in his mind; and he could think more soberly of what had happened.

Although the shadow of the stranger fell at intervals upon the glass—always distinct, and big, and thoroughly defined—it never fell so darkly as at first. Whenever it appeared the fairies uttered a general cry of consternation, and plied their little arms and legs with inconceivable activity to rub it out. And whenever they got at Dot again, and showed her to him once more, bright and beautiful, they cheered in the most inspiring manner.

They never showed her otherwise than beautiful and bright, for they were household spirits to whom falsehood is annihilation; and being so, what Dot was there for them but the one active, beaming, pleasant little creature who had been the light and sun of the carrier's home!

The fairies were prodigiously excited when they showed her, with the baby, gossiping among a knot of sage old matrons, and affecting to be wondrous old and matronly herself, and leaning in a staid, demure old way upon her husband's arm, attempting—she! such a bud of a little woman—to convey the idea of having abjured the vanities of the world in general, and of being the sort of person to whom it was no novelty at all to be a mother; yet in the same breath they showed her laughing at the carrier for being awkward, and pulling up his shirt-collar to make him smart, and mincing merrily about that very room to teach him how to dance!

They turned and stared immensely at him when they showed her with the blind girl; for though she carried cheerfulness and animation with her wheresoever she went, she bore those influences into Caleb Plummer's home, heaped up and running over. The blind girl's love for her, and trust in her, and gratitude to her; her own good, busy way of setting Bertha's thanks aside; her dexterous little arts for filling up each moment of the visit in doing something useful to the house, and really working hard while feigning to make holiday; her bountiful provision of those standing delicacies, the veal and ham pie and the bottles of beer; her radiant little face arriving at the door and taking leave; the wonderful expression in her whole self, from her neat foot to the crown of her head, of being a part of the establishment—a something necessary to it, which it couldn't be without; all this the fairies reveled in and loved her for. And once again they looked upon him all at once appealingly, and seemed to say, while some among them nestled in her dress and fondled her, "Is this the wife who has betrayed your confidence?"

More than once, or twice, or thrice, in the long, thoughtful night they showed her to him sitting on her favorite seat, with her bent head, her hands clasped on her brow, her falling hair. As he had seen her last. And when they found her thus they neither turned nor looked upon him, but gathered close round her and comforted and kisssed her, and pressed on one another to show sympathy and kindness to her and forgot him altogether.

Thus the night passed. The moon went down; the stars grew pale; the cold day broke; the sun rose. The carrier still sat, musing, in the chimney-corner. He had sat there, with his head upon his hands, all night. All night the faithful cricket had been chirp, chirp, chirping on the hearth. All night he had listened to its voice. All night the household fairies had been busy with him. All night she had been amiable and blameless in the glass except when that one shadow fell upon it.

He rose up when it was broad day, and washed and dressed himself. He couldn't go about his customary cheerful avocations—he wanted spirit for them—but it mattered the less that it was Tackleton's wedding-day, and he had arranged to make his rounds by proxy. He thought to have gone merrily to church with Dot. But such plans were at an end. It was their own wedding-day too. Ah! how little he had looked for such a close to such a year!

The carrier had expected that Tackleton would pay him an early visit; and he was right. He had not walked to and from before his own door many minutes when he saw the toy merchant coming in his chaise along the road.

As the chaise drew nearer he perceived that Tackleton was dressed out sprucely for his marriage, and that he had decorated his horse's head with flowers and favors.

The horse looked much more like a bridegroom than Tackleton, whose half-closed eye was more disagreeably expressive than ever. But the carrier took little heed of this. His thoughts had other occupation.

"John Peerybingle!" said Tackleton with an air of condolence. "My good fellow, how do you find yourself this morning?"

"I have had but a poor night, Master Tackleton," returned the carrier, shaking his head: "for I have been a good deal disturbed in my mind. But it's over now! Can you spare me half an hour or so, for some private talk?"

"I came on purpose," returned Tackleton, alighting. "Never mind the horse. He'll stand quiet enough, with the reins over this post, if you'll give him a mouthful of hay."

The carrier having brought it from his stable and set it before him, they turned into the house.

"You are not married before noon," he said, "I think?"

"No," answered Tackleton. "Plenty of time. Plenty of time."

When they entered the kitchen Tilly Slowboy was rapping at the stranger's door, which was only removed from it by a few steps. One of her very red eyes (for Tilly had been crying all night long, because her mistress cried) was at the keyhole; and she was knocking very loud; and seemed frightened.

"If you please I can't make nobody hear," said Tilly, looking round. "I hope nobody ain't gone and been and died if you please!"

This philanthropic wish Miss Slowboy emphasized with various new raps and kicks at the door, which led to no result whatever.

"Shall I go?" said Tackleton. "It's curious."

The carrier, who had turned his face from the door, signed to him to go if he would.

So Tackleton went to Tilly Slowboy's relief; and he too kicked and knocked; and he too failed to get the least reply. But he thought of trying the handle of the door; and as it opened easily he peeped in, looked in, went in, and soon came running out again.

"John Peerybingle," said Tackleton in his ear, "I hope there has been nothing—nothing rash in the night?"

The carrier turned upon him quickly.

"Because he's gone!" said Tackleton; "and the window's open. I don't see any marks—to be sure it's almost on a level with the garden: but I was afraid there might have been some—some scuffle. Eh?"

He nearly shut up the expressive eye altogether; he looked at him so hard. And he gave his eye, and his face, and his whole person, a sharp twist. As if he would have screwed the truth out of him.

"Make yourself easy," said the carrier. "He went into that room last night without harm in word or deed from me, and no one has entered it since. He is away of his own free will. I'd go out gladly at that door and beg my bread from house to house for life if I could so change the past that he had never come. But he has come and gone. And I have done with him!"

"Oh! Well, I think he has got off pretty easy," said Tackleton, taking a chair.

The sneer was lost upon the carrier, who sat down too, and shaded his face with his hand for some little time before proceeding.

"You showed me last night," he said at length, "my wife; my wife that I love; secretly——"

"And tenderly," insinuated Tackleton.

"Conniving at that man's disguise, and giving him opportunities of meeting her alone. I think there's no sight I wouldn't have rather seen than that. I think there's no man in the world I wouldn't have rather had to show it me."

"I confess to having had my suspicions always," said Tackleton. "And that has made me objectionable here, I know."

"But as you did show it me," pursued the carrier, not minding him; "and as you saw her, my wife, my wife that I love"—his voice, and eye, and hand grew steadier and firmer as he repeated these words: evidently in pursuance of a steadfast purpose--"as you saw her at this disadvantage, it is right and just that you should also see with my eyes, and look into my breast, and know what my mind is upon the subject. For it's settled," said the carrier, regarding him attentively. "And nothing can shake it now."

Tackleton muttered a few general words of assent about it being necessary to vindicate something or other; but he was overawed by the manner of his companion. Plain and unpolished as it was, it had a something dignified and noble in it, which nothing but the soul of generous honor dwelling in the man could have imparted.

"I am a plain, rough man," pursued the carrier, "with very little to recommend me. I am not a clever man, as you very well know. I am not a young man. I love my little Dot because I had seen her grow up from a child in her father's house; because I knew how precious she was; because she had been my life for years and years. There's many men I can't compare with who never could have loved my little Dot like me, I think!"

He paused, and softly beat the ground a short time with his foot before resuming.

"I often thought that though I wasn't good enough for her, I should make her a kind husband, and perhaps know her value better than another; and in this way I reconciled it to myself, and came to think it might be possible that we should be married. And in the end it came about, and we were married."

"Ha!" said Tackleton with a significant shake of the head.

"I had studied myself; I had had experience of myself; I knew how much I loved her and how happy I should be," pursued the carrier. "But I had not—I feel it now—sufficiently considered her."

"To be sure," said Tackleton. "Giddiness, frivolity, fickleness, love of admiration! Not considered! All left out of sight! Ha!"

"You had best not interrupt me," said the carrier with some sternness, "till you understand me; and you're wide of doing so. If yesterday I'd have struck that man down at a blow, who dared to breathe a word against her, to-day I'd set my foot upon his face if he was my brother!"

The toy merchant gazed at him in astonishment. He went on in a softer tone:

"Did I consider," said the carrier, "that I took her—at her age and with her beauty—from her young companions and the many scenes of which she was the ornament, in which she was the brightest little star that ever shone, to shut her up from day to day in my dull house and keep my tedious company? Did I consider how little suited I was to her sprightly humor, and how wearisome a plodding man like me must be to one of her quick spirit? Did I consider that it was no merit in me, or claim in me, that I loved her when everybody must who knew her? Never. I took advantage of her hopeful nature and her cheerful disposition; and I married her. I wish I never had! For her sake; not for mine!"

The toy merchant gazed at him without winking. Even the half-shut eye was open now.

"Heaven bless her!" said the carrier, "for the cheerful constancy with which she tried to keep the knowledge of this from me! And Heaven help me, that in my slow mind I have not found it out before! Poor child! Poor Dot! I not to find it out, who have seen her eyes fill with tears when such a marriage as our own was spoken of! I, who have seen the secret trembling on her lips a hundred times, and never suspected it till last night! Poor girl! That I could ever hope she would be fond of me! That I could ever believe she was!"

"She made a show of it," said Tackleton. "She made such a show of it that to tell you the truth it was the origin of my misgivings."

And here he asserted the superiority of May Fielding, who certainly made no sort of show of being fond of him.

"She has tried," said the poor carrier with greater emotion than he had exhibited yet; "I only now begin to know how hard she has tried to be my dutiful and zealous wife. How good she has been; how much she has done; how brave and strong a heart she has; let the happiness I have known under this roof bear witness! It will be some help and comfort to me when I am here alone."

"Here alone?" said Tackleton. "Oh! Then you do mean to take some notice of this?"

"I mean," returned the carrier, "to do her the greatest kindness, and make her the best reparation in my power. I can release her from the daily pain of an unequal marriage and the struggle to conceal it. She shall be as free as I can render her."

"Make her reparation!" exclaimed Tackleton, twisting and turning his great ears with his hands. "There must be something wrong here. You didn't say that, of course."

The carrier set his grip upon the collar of the toy merchant and shook him like a reed.

"Listen to me!" he said. "And take care that you hear me right. Listen to me. Do I speak plainly?"

"Very plainly indeed," answered Tackleton.

"As if I meant it?"

"Very much as if you meant it."

"I sat upon that hearth last night, all night," exclaimed the carrier. "On the spot where she has often sat beside me with her sweet face looking into mine. I called up her whole life day by day. I had her dear self in its every passage in review before me. And upon my soul she is innocent, if there is One to judge the innocent and guilty!"

Stanch cricket on the hearth! Loyal household fairies!

"Passion and distrust have left me!" said the carrier, "and nothing but my grief remains. In an unhappy moment some old lover, better suited to her tastes and years than I, forsaken, perhaps, for me, against her will, returned. In an unhappy moment, taken by surprise, and wanting time to think of what she did, she made herself a party to his treachery by concealing it. Last night she saw him in the interview we witnessed. It was wrong. But otherwise than this she is innocent if there is truth on earth!"

"If that is your opinion——" Tackleton began.

"So let her go!" pursued the carrier. "Go with my blessing for the many happy hours she has given me and my forgiveness for any pang she has caused me. Let her go and have the peace of mind I wish her! She'll never hate me. She'll learn to like me better, when I'm not a drag upon her and she wears the chain I have riveted more lightly. This is the day on which I took her, with so little thought for her enjoyment, from her home. To-day she shall return to it, and I will trouble her no more. Her father and mother will be here to-day—we had made a little plan for keeping it together—and they shall take her home. I can trust her, there or anywhere. She leaves me without blame, and she will live so, I am sure. If I should die—I may perhaps while she is still young; I have lost some courage in a few hours—she'll find that I remembered her and loved her to the last! This is the end of what you showed me. Now it's over!"

"Oh, no, John, not over. Do not say it's over yet! Not quite yet. I have heard your noble words. I could not steal away, pretending to be ignorant of what has affected me with such deep gratitude. Do not say it's over till the clock has struck again!"

She had entered shortly after Tackleton, and had remained there. She never looked at Tackleton, but fixed her eyes upon her husband. But she kept away from him, setting as wide a space as possible between them; and though she spoke with most impassioned earnestness, she went no nearer to him even then. How different in this from her old self!

"No hand can make the clock which will strike again for me the hours that are gone," replied the carrier with a faint smile. "But let it be so, if you will, my dear. It will strike soon. It's of little matter what we say. I'd try to please you in a harder case than that."

"Well!" muttered Tackleton. "I must be off, for when the clock strikes again it'll be necessary for me to be upon my way to church. Good-morning, John Peerybingle. I'm sorry to be deprived of the pleasure of your company. Sorry for the loss, and the occasion of it too!"

"I have spoken plainly?" said the carrier, accompanying him to the door.

"Oh, quite!"

"And you'll remember what I have said?"

"Why, if you compel me to make the observation," said Tackleton, previously taking the precaution of getting into his chaise, "I must say that it was so very unexpected that I'm far from being likely to forget it."

"The better for us both," returned the carrier. "Good-by. I give you joy!"

"I wish I could give it to you," said Tackleton. "As I can't, thank'ee. Between ourselves (as I told you before, eh?), I don't much think I shall have the less joy in my married life because May hasn't been too officious about me and too demonstrative. Good-by! Take care of yourself."

The carrier stood looking after him until he was smaller in the distance than his horse's flowers and favors near at hand; and then, with a deep sigh, went strolling like a restless, broken man among some neighboring elms; unwilling to return until the clock was on the eve of striking.

His little wife being left alone sobbed piteously; but often dried her eyes and checked herself to say how good he was, how excellent he was! and once or twice she laughed; so heartily, triumphantly, and incoherently(still crying all the time) that Tilly was quite horrified.

"Ow if you please don't!" said Tilly. "It's enough to dead and bury the baby, so it is if you please."

"Will you bring him sometimes to see his father, Tilly," inquired her mistress, drying her eyes, "when I can't live here, and have gone to my old home?"

"Ow if you please don't!" cried Tilly, throwing back her head and bursting out into a howl—she looked at the moment uncommonly like Boxer; "Ow if you please don't! Ow, what has everybody gone and been and done with everybody, making everybody else so wretched! Ow-w-w-w!"

The soft-hearted Slowboy trailed off at this juncture into such a deplorable howl, the more tremendous from its long suppression, that she must infallibly have awakened the baby and frightened him into something serious (probably convulsions) if her eyes had not encountered Caleb Plummer leading in his daughter. This spectacle restoring her to a sense of the proprieties, she stood for some few moments silent, with her mouth wide open; and then, posting off to the bed on which the baby lay asleep, danced in a weird Saint Vitus manner on the floor, and at the same time rummaged with her face and head among the bedclothes, apparently deriving much relief from those extraordinary operations.

"Mary!" said Bertha. "Not at the marriage!"

"I told her you would not be there, mum," whispered Caleb. "I heard as much last night. But bless you," said the little man, taking her tenderly by both hands, "I don't care for what they say. I don't believe them. There ain't much of me, but that little should be torn to pieces sooner than I'd trust a word against you!"

He put his arms about her and hugged her as a child might have hugged one of his own dolls.

"Bertha couldn't stay at home this morning," said Caleb. "She was afraid, I know, to hear the bells ring, and couldn't trust heself to be so near them on their wedding-day. So we started in good time and came here. I have been thinking of what I have done," said Caleb after a moment's pause; "I have been blaming myself till I hardly knew what to do or where to turn for the distress of mind I have caused her; and I've come to the conclusion that I'd better, if you'll stay with me, mum, the while, tell her the truth. You'll stay with me the while?" he inquired, trembling from head to foot. "I don't know what effect it may have upon her; I don't know what she'll think of me; I don't know that she'll ever care for her poor father afterward. But it's best for her that she should be undeceived, and I must bear the consequences as I deserve!"

"Mary," said Bertha, "where is your hand! Ah! Here it is: here it is!" pressing it to her lips with a smile and drawing it through her arm. "I heard them speaking softly among themselves last night of some blame against you. They were wrong."

The carrier's wife was silent. Caleb answered for her.

"They were wrong," he said.

"I knew it!" cried Bertha proudly. "I told them so. I scorned to hear a word! Blame her with justice!" She pressed her hand between her own and the soft cheek against her face. "No! I am not so blind as that."

Her father went on one side of her while Dot remained upon the other, holding her hand.

"I know you all," said Bertha, "better than you think. But none so well as her. Not even you, father. There is nothing half so real and so true about me as she is. If I could be restored to sight this instant and not a word were spoken, I could choose her from a crowd! My sister!"

"Bertha, my dear," said Caleb, "I have something on my mind I want to tell you while we three are alone. Hear me kindly! I have a confession to make to you, my darling."

"A confession, father?"

"I have wandered from the truth and lost myself, my child," said Caleb, with a pitiable expression in his bewildered face. "I have wandered from the truth, intending to be kind to you; and have been cruel."

She turned her wonder-stricken face toward him and repeated "Cruel!"

"He accuses himself too strongly, Bertha," said Dot. "You'll say so presently. You'll be the first to tell him so."

"He cruel to me!" cried Bertha with a smile of incredulity.

"Not meaning it, my child," said Caleb. "But I have been; though I never suspected it till yesterday. My dear blind daughter, hear me and forgive me! The world you live in, heart of mine, doesn't exist as I have represented it. The eyes you have trusted in have been false to you."

She turned her wonder-stricken face toward him still; but drew back and clung closer to her friend.

"Your road in life was rough, my poor one," said Caleb, "and I meant to smooth it for you. I have altered objects, changed the characters of people, invented many things that never have been to make you happier. I have had concealments from you, put deceptions on you, God forgive me! and surrounded you with fancies."

"But living people are not fancies!" she said hurriedly, and turning very pale, and still retiring from him. "You can't change them."

"I have done so, Bertha," pleaded Caleb. "There is one person that you know, my dove——"

"Oh, father! why do you say I know?" she answered in a tone of keen reproach. "What and whom do I know? I, who have no leader! I, so miserably blind!"

In the anguish of her heart she stretched out her hands as if she were groping her way; then spread them in a manner most forlorn and sad upon her face.

"The marriage that takes place to-day," said Caleb, "is with a stern, sordid, grinding man. A hard master to you and me, my dear, for many years. Ugly in his looks and in his nature. Cold and callous always. Unlike what I have painted him to you in everything, my child. In everything."

"Oh, why," cried the blind girl, tortured, as it seemed, almost beyond endurance, "why did you ever do this? Why did you ever fill my heart so full, and then come in like death and tear away the objects of my love? Oh, Heaven, how blind I am! How helpless and alone!"

Her afflicted father hung his head and offered no reply but in his penitence and sorrow.

She had been but a short time in this passion of regret, when the cricket on the hearth, unheard by all but her, began to chirp. Not merrily, but in a low, faint, sorrowing way. It was so mournful that her tears began to flow; and when the presence which had been beside the carrier all night appeared behind her, pointing to her father, they fell down like rain.

She heard the cricket voice more plainly soon, and was conscious, through her blindness, of the presence hovering about her father.

"Mary," said the blind girl, "tell me what my home is. What it truly is."

"It is a poor place, Bertha; very poor and bare indeed. The house will scarcely keep out wind and rain another winter. It is as roughly shielded from the weather, Bertha," Dot continued in a low, clear voice, "as your poor father in his sack-cloth coat."

The blind girl, greatly agitated, rose, and led the carrier's little wife aside.

"Those presents that I took such care of; that came almost at my wish and were so dearly welcome to me," she said, trembling; "where did they come from? Did you send them?"

"No."

"Who, then?"

Dot saw she knew already and was silent. The blind girl spread her hands before her face again. But in quite another manner now.

"Dear Mary, a moment. One moment. More this way. Speak softly to me. You are true, I know. You'd not deceive me now; would you?"

"No, Bertha, indeed!"

"No, I am sure you would not. You have too much pity for me. Mary, look across the room to where we were just now—to where my father is—my father, so compassionate and loving to me—and tell me what you see."

"I see," said Dot, who understood her well, "an old man sitting in a chair and leaning sorrowfully on the back with his face resting on his hand. As if his child should comfort him, Bertha."

"Yes, yes. She will. Go on."

"He is an old man worn with care and work. He is a spare, dejected, thoughtful, gray-haired man. I see him now, despondent and bowed down, and striving against nothing. But, Bertha, I have seen him many times before, and striving hard in many ways for one great sacred object. And I honor his gray head and bless him!"

The blind girl broke away from her; and throwing herself upon her knees before him, took the gray head to her breast.

"It is my sight restored. It is my sight!" she cried. "I have been blind, and now my eyes are open. I never knew him! To think I might have died, and never truly seen the father who has been so loving to me!"

There were no words for Caleb's emotion.

"There is not a gallant figure on this earth," exclaimed the blind girl, holding him in her embrace, "that I would love so dearly and would cherish so devotedly as this! The grayer and more worn, the dearer, father! Never let them say I am blind again. There's not a furrow in his face, there's not a hair upon his head, that shall be forgotten in my prayers and thanks to Heaven!"

Caleb managed to articulate "My Bertha!"

"And in my blindness, I believed him," said the girl, caressing him with tears of exquisite affection, "to be so different! And having him beside me day by day, so mindful of me always, never dreamed of this!"

"The fresh smart father in the blue coat, Bertha," said poor Caleb. "He's gone!"

"Nothing is gone," she answered. "Dearest father, no! Everything is here—in you. The father that I loved so well; the father that I never loved enough and never knew; the benefactor whom I first began to reverence and love, because he had such sympathy for me; all are here in you. Nothing is dead to me. The soul of all that was most dear to me is here—here, with the worn face and the gray head. And I am not blind, father, any longer!"

Dot's whole attention had been concentrated during this discourse upon the father and daughter; but looking now toward the little haymaker in the Moorish meadow, she saw the clock was within a few minutes of striking, and fell immediately into a nervous and excited state.

"Father," said Bertha, hesitating. "Mary."

"Yes, my dear," returned Caleb. "Here she is."

"There is no change in her. You never told me anything of her that was not true?"

"I should have done it, my dear, I am afraid,'" returned Caleb, "if I could have made her better than she was. But I must have changed her for the worse, if I had changed her at all. Nothing could improve her, Bertha."

Confident as the blind girl had been when she asked the question, her delight and pride in the reply and her renewed embrace of Dot were charming to behold.

"More changes than you think for may happen, though, my dear," said Dot. "Changes for the better, I mean; changes for great joy to some of us. You mustn't let them startle you too much, if any such should ever happen and affect you. Are those wheels upon the road? You've a quick ear, Bertha. Are they wheels?"

"Yes. Coming very fast."

"I—I—I know you have a quick ear," said Dot, placing her hand upon her heart, and evidently talking on as fast as she could to hide its palpitating state, "because I have noticed it often, and because you were so quick to find out that strange step last night. Though why you should have said, as I very well recollect you did say, Bertha, 'Whose step is that?' and why you should have taken any greater observation of it than of any other step, I don't know. Though as I said just now there are great changes in the world: great changes: and we can't do better than prepare ourselves to be surprised at hardly anything."

Caleb wondered what this meant; perceiving that she spoke to him no less than to his daughter. He saw her with astonishment so fluttered and distressed that she could scarcely breathe; and holding to a chair to save herself from falling.

"They are wheels indeed!" she panted. "Coming nearer! Nearer! Very close! And now you hear them stopping at the garden gate! And now you hear a step outside the door—the same step, Bertha, is it not?—and now——"

She uttered a wild cry of uncontrollable delight; and running up to Caleb put her hands upon his eyes as a young man rushed into the room, and flinging away his hat into the air, came sweeping down upon them.

"Is it over?" cried Dot.

"Yes."

"Happily over?"

"Yes!"

"Do you recollect the voice, dear Caleb? Did you ever hear the like of it before?" cried Dot.

"If my boy in the golden South Americas was alive——" said Caleb, trembling.

"He is alive!" shrieked Dot, removing her hands from his eyes and clapping them in ecstasy; "look at him! See where he stands before you, healthy and strong! Your own dear son! Your own dear living, loving brother, Bertha!"

All honor to the little creature for her transports! All honor to her tears and laughter, when the three were locked in one another's arms! All honor to the heartiness with which she met the sunburned sailor-fellow, with his dark streaming hair, half-way, and never turned her rosy little mouth aside, but suffered him to kiss freely and to press her to his bounding heart!

And honor to the cuckoo too—why not!—for bursting out of the trap-door in the Moorish palace like a housebreaker, and hiccoughing twelve times on the assembled company as if he had got drunk for joy!

The carrier, entering, started back. And well he might, to find himself in such good company.

"Look, John!" said Caleb exultingly, "look here! My own boy from the golden South Americas! My own son! Him that you fitted out and sent away yourself! Him that you were always such a friend to!"

The carrier advanced to seize him by the hand; but recoiling as some feature in his face awakened a remembrance of the deaf man in the cart, said:

"Edward! Was it you?"

"Now tell him all!" cried Dot. "Tell him all, Edward; and don't spare me, for nothing shall make me spare myself in his eyes ever again."

"I was the man," said Edward.

"And could you steal disguised into the house of your old friend?" rejoined the carrier. "There was a frank boy once—how many years is it, Caleb, since we heard that he was dead, and had it proved, we thought?—who never would have done that."

"There was a generous friend of mine, once; more a father to me than a friend," said Edward, "who never would have judged me, or any other man, unheard. You were he. So I am certain you will hear me now."

The carrier with a troubled glance at Dot, who still kept far away from him, replied: "Well! that's but fair. I will."

"You must know that when I left here, a boy," said Edward, "I was in love, and my love was returned. She was a very young girl, who perhaps (you may tell me) didn't know her own mind. But I knew mine, and I had a passion for her."

"You had!" exclaimed the carrier. "You!"

"Indeed I had," returned the other. "And she returned it. I have ever since believed she did, and I am sure she did."

"Heaven help me!" said the carrier. "This is worse than all."

"Constant to her," said Edward, "and returning, full of hope, after many hardships and perils, to redeem my part of our old contract, I heard, twenty miles away, that she was false to me; that she had forgotten me; and had bestowed herself upon another and a richer man. I had no mind to reproach her; but I wished to see her and to prove beyond dispute that this was true. I hoped she might have been forced into it, against her own desire and recollection. It would be small comfort, but it would be some, I thought, and on I came. That I might have the truth, the real truth; observing freely for myself, and judging for myself, without obstruction on the one hand or presenting my own influence (if I had any) before her on the other; I dressed myself—unlike myself—you know how; and waited on the road—you know where. You had no suspicion of me; neither had—had she," pointing to Dot, "until I whispered in her ear at that fireside, and she so nearly betrayed me."

"But when she knew that Edward was alive and had come back," sobbed Dot, now speaking for herself, as she had burned to do all through this narrative, "and when she knew his purpose, she advised him by all means to keep his secret close; for his old friend John Peerybingle was much too open in his nature, and too clumsy in all artifice—being a clumsy man in general," said Dot, half-laughing and half-crying—"to keep it from him. And when she—that's me, John," sobbed the little woman—"told him all, and how his sweetheart had believed him to be dead; and how she had at last been over-persuaded by her mother into a marriage which the silly, dear old thing called advantageous; and when she—that's me again, John—told him they were not yet married (though close upon it), and that it would be nothing but a sacrifice if it went on, for there was no love on her side; and when he went nearly mad with joy to hear it; then she—that's me again—said she would go between them, as she had often done before in old times, John, and would sound his sweetheart and be sure that what she—me again, John—said and thought was right. And it was right, John! And they were brought together, John! And they were married, John, an hour ago! And here's the bride! And Gruff & Tackleton may die a bachelor! And I'm a happy little woman, May, God bless you!"

She was an irresistible little woman, if that be anything to the purpose; and never so completely irresistible as in her present transports. There never were congratulations so endearing and delicious as those she lavished on herself and on the bride.

Amid the tumult of emotions in his breast, the honest carrier had stood confounded. Flying now toward her, Dot stretched out her hand to stop him, and retreated as before.

"No, John, no! Hear all! Don't love me any more, John, till you've heard every word I have to say. It was wrong to have a secret from you, John. I'm very sorry. I didn't think it any harm till I came and sat down by you on the little stool last night. But when I knew by what was written in your face that you had seen me walking in the gallery with Edward, and when I knew what you thought, I felt how giddy and how wrong it was. But oh, dear John, how could you—could you think so!"

Little woman, how she sobbed again! John Peerybingle would have caught her in his arms. But no; she wouldn't let him.

"Don't you love me yet, please, John! Not for a long time yet! When I was sad about this intended marriage, dear, it was because I remembered May and Edward such young lovers; and knew that her heart was far away from Tackleton. You believe that, now. Don't you, John?"

John was going to make another rush at this appeal; but she stopped him again.

"No; keep there, please, John! When I laugh at you, as I sometimes do, John, and call you clumsy and a dear old goose, and names of that sort, it's because I love you, John, so well, and take such pleasure in your ways, and wouldn't see you altered in the least respect to have you made a king to-morrow."

"Hooroar!" said Caleb with unusual vigor. "My opinion!"

"And when I speak of people being middle-aged and steady, John, and pretend that we are a humdrum couple, going on in a jog-trot sort of way, it's only because I'm such a silly little thing, John, that I like sometimes to act a kind of play with baby, and all that: and make believe."

She saw that he was coming; and stopped him again. But she was very nearly too late.

"No, don't love me for another minute or two, if you please, John! What I want most to tell you I have kept to the last. My dear, good, generous John, when we were talking the other night about the cricket I had it on my lips to say that at first I did not love you quite so dearly as I do now; that when I first came home here, I was half-afraid I mightn't learn to love you every bit as well as I hoped and prayed I might—being so very young, John! But, dear John, every day and hour I loved you more and more. And if I could have loved you better than I do, the noble words I heard you say this morning would have made me. But I can't. All the affection that I had (it was a great deal, John) I gave you, as you well deserve, long, long ago, and I have no more left to give. Now, my dear husband, take me to your heart again! That's my home, John; and never, never think of sending me to any other!"

You never will derive so much delight from seeing a glorious little woman in the arms of a third party as you would have felt if you had seen Dot run into the carrier's embrace. It was the most complete, unmitigated, soul-fraught little piece of earnestness that ever you beheld in all your days.

You may be sure the carrier was in a state of perfect rapture; and you may be sure Dot was likewise; and you may be sure they all were, inclusive of Miss Slowboy, who wept copiously for joy, and wishing to include her young charge in the general interchange of congratulations, handed round the baby to everybody in succession as if it were something to drink.

But now the sound of wheels was heard again outside the door; and somebody exclaimed that Gruff & Tackleton was coming back. Speedily that worthy gentleman appeared, looking warm and flustered.

"Why, what the devil's this, John Peerybingle?" said Tackleton. "There's some mistake. I appointed Mrs. Tackleton to meet me at the church, and I'll swear I passed her on the road on her way here. Oh! here she is! I beg your pardon, sir; I haven't the pleasure of knowing you; but if you can do me the favor to spare this young lady, she has rather a particular engagement this morning."

"But I can't spare her," returned Edward. "I couldn't think of it."

"What do you mean, you vagabond?" said Tackleton.

"I mean that as I can make allowance for your being vexed," returned the other with a smile, "I am as deaf to harsh discourse this morning as I was to all discourse last night."

The look that Tackleton bestowed upon him, and the start he gave!

"I am sorry, sir," said Edward, holding out May's left hand and especially the third finger, "that the young lady can't accompany you to church; but as she has been there once this morning, perhaps you'll excuse her."

Tackleton looked hard at the third finger, and took a little piece of silver paper, apparently containing a ring, from his waistcoat-pocket.

"Miss Slowboy," said Tackleton. "Will you have the kindness to throw that in the fire? Thank'ee."

"It was a previous engagement, quite an old engagement, that prevented my wife from keeping her appointment with you, I assure you," said Edward.

"Mr. Tackleton will do me the justice to acknowledge that I revealed it to him faithfully, and that I told him many times I never could forget it," said May, blushing.

"Oh, certainly!" said Tackleton. "Oh, to be sure. Oh, it's all right. It's quite correct. Mrs. Edward Plummer, I infer?"

"That's the name," returned the bridegroom.

"Ah, I shouldn't have known you, sir," said Tackleton, scrutinizing his face narrowly and making a low bow. "I give you joy, sir!"

"Thank'ee."

"Mrs. Peerybingle," said Tackleton, turning suddenly to where she stood with her husband, "I am sorry. You haven't done me a very great kindness, but upon my life I am sorry. You are better than I thought you. John Peerybingle, I am sorry. You understand me; that's enough. It's quite correct, ladies and gentlemen all, and perfectly satisfactory. Good-morning!"

With these words he carried it off, and carried himself off too: merely stopping at the door to take the flowers and favors from his horse's head, and to kick that animal once in the ribs as a means of informing him that there was a screw loose in his arrangements.

Of course it became a serious duty now to make such a day of it as should mark these events for a high feast and festival in the Peerybingle calendar for evermore. Accordingly, Dot went to work to produce such an entertainment as should reflect undying honor on the house and on every one concerned; and in a very short space of time she was up to her dimpled elbows in flour, and whitening the carrier's coat every time he came near her by stopping him to give him a kiss. That good fellow washed the greens, and peeled the turnips, and broke the plates, and upset iron pots full of cold water on the fire, and made himself useful in all sorts of ways: while a couple of professional assistants, hastily called in from somewhere in the neighborhood, as on a point of life or death, ran against each other in all the doorways and round all the corners, and everybody tumbled over Tilly Slowboy and the baby everywhere. Tilly never came out in such force before. Her ubiquity was the theme of general admiration. She was a stumbling-block in the passage at twenty-five minutes past two; a man-trap in the kitchen at half-past two precisely; and a pitfall in the garret at twenty-five minutes to three. The baby's head was, as it were, a test and touchstone for every description of matter—animal, vegetable, and mineral. Nothing was in use that day that didn't come, at some time or other, into close acquaintance with it.

Then there was a great expedition set on foot to go and find out Mrs. Fielding; and to be dismally penitent to that excellent gentlewoman; and to bring her back by force, if needful, to be happy and forgiving. And when the expedition first discovered her she would listen to no terms at all, but said an unspeakable number of times that ever she should have lived to see the day! and couldn't be got to say anything else except "Now carry me to the grave:" which seemed absurd on account of her not being dead, or anything at all like it. After a time she lapsed into a state of dreadful calmness, and observed that when that unfortunate train of circumstances had occurred in the indigo trade she had foreseen that she would be exposed, during her whole life, to every species of insult and contumely; and that she was glad to find it was the case; and begged they wouldn't trouble themselves about her—for what was she? oh, dear! a nobody!—but would forget that such a being lived and would take their course in life without her. From this bitterly sarcastic mood she passed into an angry one, in which she gave vent to the remarkable expression that the worm would turn if trodden on; and after that she yielded to a soft regret, and said if they had only given her their confidence, what might she not have had it in her power to suggest! Taking advantage of this crisis in her feelings, the expedition embraced her; and she very soon had her gloves on and was on her way to John Peerybingle's in a state of unimpeachable gentility, with a paper parcel at her side containing a cap of state almost as tall and quite as stiff as a miter.

Then there were Dot's father and mother to come in another little chaise; and they were behind their time; and fears were entertained; and there was much looking out for them down the road; and Mrs. Fielding always would look in the wrong and morally impossible direction; and being apprised thereof, hoped she might take the liberty of looking where she pleased. At last they came: a chubby little couple jogging along in a snug and comfortable little way that quite belonged to the Dot family; and Dot and her mother, side by side, were wonderful to see. They were so like each other.

Then Dot's mother had to renew her acquaintance with May's mother; and May's mother always stood on her gentility; and Dot's mother never stood on anything but her active little feet. And old Dot—so to call Dot's father, I forgot it wasn't his right name, but never mind—took liberties and shook hands at first sight, and seemed to think a cap but so much starch and muslin, and didn't defer himself at all to the indigo trade, but said there was no help for it now; and in Mrs. Fielding's summing up was a good-natured kind of man—but coarse, my dear.

I wouldn't have missed Dot doing the honors in her wedding-gown, my benison on her bright face! for any money. No! nor the good carrier, so jovial and so ruddy, at the bottom of the table. Nor the brown, fresh sailor-fellow and his handsome wife. Nor any one among them. To have missed the dinner would have been to miss as jolly and as stout a meal as man need eat; and to have missed the overflowing cups in which they drank "The Wedding-Day" would have been the greatest miss of all.

After dinner Caleb sang the song about the sparkling bowl. As I'm a living man, hoping to keep so for a year or two, he sang it through.

And, by the bye, a most unlooked-for incident occurred just as he finished the last verse.

There was a tap at the door, and a man came staggering in without saying with your leave or by your leave, with something heavy on his head. Setting this down in the middle of the table, symmetrically in the center of the nuts and apples, he said:

"Mr. Tackleton's compliments, and as he hasn't got no use for the cake himself, p'r'aps you'll eat it."

And with those words he walked off.

There was some surprise among the company, as you may imagine. Mrs. Fielding, being a lady of infinite discernment, suggested that the cake was poisoned, and related a narrative of a cake which, within her knowledge, had turned a seminary for young ladies blue. But she was overruled by acclamation; and the cake was cut by May with much ceremony and rejoicing.

I don't think any one had tasted it, when there came another tap at the door, and the same man appeared again, having under his arm a vast brown-paper parcel.

"Mr. Tackleton's compliments, and he'd sent a few toys for the babby. They ain't ugly."

After the delivery of which expressions he retired again.

The whole party would have expreienced great difficulty in finding words for their astonishment, even if they had had ample time to seek them. But they had none at all; for the messenger had scarcely shut the door behind him, when there came another tap and Tackleton himself walked in.

"Mrs. Peerybingle!" said the toy merchant, hat in hand, "I'm sorry. I'm more sorry than I was this morning. I have had time to think of it. John Peerybingle! I'm sour by disposition; but I can't help being sweetened, more or less, by coming face to face with such a man as you. Caleb! this unconscious little nurse gave me a broken hint last night, of which I have found the thread. I blush to think how easily I might have bound you and your daughter to me, and what a miserable idiot I was, when I took her for one! Friends, one and all, my house is very lonely to-night. I have not so much as a cricket on my hearth. I have scared them all away. Be gracious to me; let me join this happy party!"

He was at home in five minutes. You never saw such a fellow. What had he been doing with himself all his life, never to have known before his great capacity of being jovial? Or what had the fairies been doing with him, to have effected such a change?

"John! you won't send me home this evening, will you?" whispered Dot.

He had been very near it, though!

There wanted but one living creature to make the party complete; and in the twinkling of an eye there he was, very thirsty with hard running, and engaged in hopeless endeavors to squeeze his head into a narrow pitcher. He had gone with the cart to its journey's end, very much disgusted with the absence of his master, and stupendously rebellious to the deputy. After lingering about the stable for some little time, vainly attempting to incite the old horse to the mutinous act of returning on his own account, he had walked into the tap-room and laid himself down before the fire. But suddenly yielding to the conviction that the deputy was a humbug and must be abandoned, he had got up again, turned tail, and come home.

There was a dance in the evening. With which general mention of that recreation, I should have left it alone, if I had not some reason to suppose that it was quite an original dance, and one of a most uncommon figure. It was formed in an odd way; in this way.

Edward, that sailor-fellow—a good free, dashing sort of a fellow he was—had been telling them various marvels concerning parrots, and mines, and Mexicans, and gold-dust, when all at once he took it in his head to jump up from his seat and propose a dance; for Bertha's harp was there, and she had such a hand upon it as you seldom hear. Dot (sly little piece of affectation when she chose) said her dancing days were over; I think because the carrier was smoking his pipe, and she liked sitting by him best. Mrs. Fielding had no choice, of course, but to say her dancing days were over, after that; and everybody said the same, except May; May was ready.

So May and Edward got up amid great applause to dance alone; and Bertha plays her liveliest tune.

Well! if you'll believe me, they have not been dancing five minutes, when suddenly the carrier flings his pipe away, takes Dot round the waist, dashes out into the room, and starts off with her, toe and heel, quite wonderfully. Tackleton no sooner sees this than he skims across to Mrs. Fielding, takes her round the waist, and follows suit. Old Dot no sooner sees this than up he is, all alive, whisks off Mrs. Dot in the middle of the dance, and is the foremost there. Caleb no sooner sees this than he clutches Tilly Slowboy by both hands and goes off at score; Miss Slowboy firm in the belief that diving hotly in among the other couples and effecting any number of concussions with them is your only principle of footing it.

Hark! how the cricket joins the music with its chirp, chirp, chirp; and how the kettle hums!

. . . .

But what is this? Even as I listen to them blithely, and turn toward Dot for one last glimpse of a little figure very pleasant to me, she and the rest have vanished into air, and I am left alone. A cricket sings upon the hearth; a broken child's toy lies upon the ground; and nothing else remains.

THE BATTLE OF LIFE.

PART THE FIRST.

Once upon a time, it matters little when, and in stalwart England, it matters little where, a fierce battle was fought. It was fought upon a long summer day when the waving grass was green. Many a wild flower formed by the Almighty Hand to be a perfumed goblet for the dew felt its enameled cup filled high with blood that day, and shrinking dropped. Many an insect deriving its delicate color from harmless leaves and herbs was stained anew that day by dying men, and marked its frightened way with an unnatural track. The painted butterfly took blood into the air upon the edges of its wings. The stream ran red. The trodden ground became a quagmire, whence, from sullen pools collected in the prints of human feet and horses' hoofs, the one prevailing hue still lowered and glimmered at the sun.

Heaven keep us from a knowledge of the sights the moon beheld upon that field, when, coming up above the black line of distant rising ground, softened and blurred at the edge by trees, she rose into the sky and looked upon the plain, strewn with upturned faces that had once at mothers' breasts sought mothers' eyes or slumbered happily. Heaven keep us from a knowledge of the secrets whispered afterward upon the tainted wind that blew across the scene of that day's work and that night's death and suffering! Many a lonely moon was bright upon the battle-ground, and many a star kept mournful watch upon it, and many a wind from every quarter of the earth blew over it before the traces of the fight were worn away.

They lurked and lingered for a long time, but survived in little things; for Nature, far above the evil passions of men, soon recovered her serenity, and smiled upon the guilty battle-ground as she had done before, when it was innocent. The larks sang high above it; the swallows skimmed and dipped and flitted to and fro; the shadows of the flying clouds pursued each other swiftly, over grass and corn and turnip-field and wood, and over roof and church-spire in the nestling town among the trees, away into the bright distance on the borders of the sky and earth, where the red sunsets faded. Crops were sown, and grew up, and were gathered in; the stream that had been crimsoned turned a water mill; men whistled at the plow; gleaners and haymakers were seen in quiet groups at work; sheep and oxen pastured; boys whooped and called in fields to scare away the birds; smoke rose from the cottage chimneys; Sabbath bells rang peacefully; old people lived and died; the timid creatures of the field and simple flowers of the bush and garden grew and withered in their destined terms: and all upon the fierce and bloody battle-ground where thousands upon thousands had been killed in the great fight.

But there were deep green patches in the growing corn at first that people looked at awfully. Year after year they reappeared; and it was known that underneath those fertile spots heaps of men and horses lay buried, indiscriminately enriching the ground. The husbandmen who plowed those places shrank from the great worms abounding there; and the sheaves they yielded were for many a long year called the battle sheaves and set apart; and no one ever knew a battle sheaf to be among the last load at a harvest home. For a long time every furrow that was turned revealed some fragments of the fight. For a long time there were wounded trees upon the ground; and scraps of hacked and broken fence and wall, where deadly struggles had been made; and trampled parts where not a leaf or blade would grow. For a long time no village girl would dress her hair or bosom with the sweetest flower from that field of death: and after many a year had come and gone the berries growing there were still believed to leave too deep a stain upon the hand that plucked them.

The seasons in their course, however, though they passed as lightly as the summer clouds themselves, obliterated in the lapse of time even these remains of the old conflict; and wore away such legendary traces of it as the neighboring people carried in their minds, until they dwindled into old wives' tales, dimly remembered round the winter fire, and waning every year. Where the wild flowers and berries had so long remained upon the stem untouched gardens arose, and houses were built, and children played at battles on the turf. The wounded trees had long ago made Christmas logs, and blazed and roared away. The deep green patches were no greener now than the memory of those who lay in dust below. The plowshare still turned up from time to time some rusty bits of metal, but it was hard to say what use they had ever served, and those who found them wondered and disputed. An old dinted corslet and a helmet had been hanging in the church so long that the same weak, half-blind old man who tried in vain to make them out above the whitewashed arch had marveled at them as a baby. If the host slain upon the field could have been for a moment reanimated in the forms in which they fell, each upon the spot that was the bed of his untimely death, gashed and ghastly soldiers would have stared in, hundreds deep, at household door and window; and would have risen on the hearths of quiet homes; and would have been the garnered store of barns and granaries; and would have started up between the cradled infant and its nurse; and would have floated with the stream, and whirled round on the mill, and crowded the orchard, and burdened the meadow, and piled the rick-yard high with dying men. So altered was the battle-ground, where thousands upon thousands had been killed in the great fight.

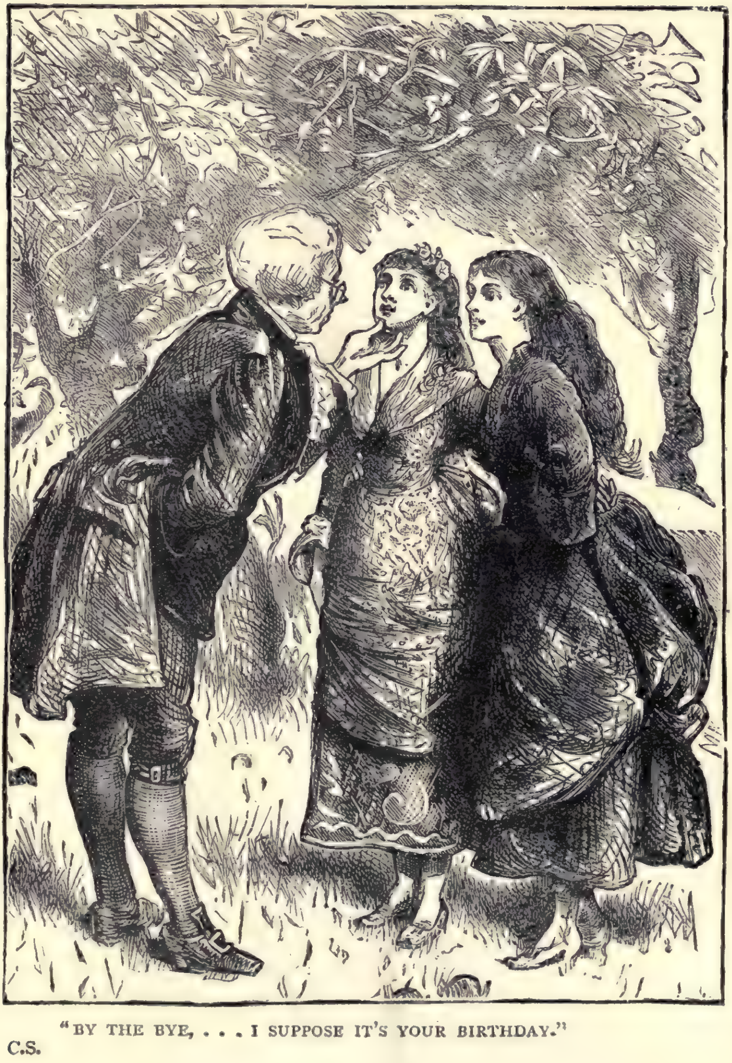
Nowhere more altered, perhaps, about a hundred years ago, than in one little orchard attached to an old stone house with a honeysuckle porch; where, on a bright autumn morning, there were sounds of music and laughter, and where two girls danced merrily together on the grass, while some half-dozen peasant women standing on ladders, gathering the apples from the trees, stopped in their work to look down and share their enjoyment. It was a pleasant, lively, natural scene: a beautiful day, a retired spot; and the two girls, quite unconstrained and careless, danced in the freedom and gayety of their hearts.

If there were no such thing as display in the world, my private opinion is, and I hope you agree with me, that we might get on a great deal better than we do, and might be infinitely more agreeable company than we are. It was charming to see how these girls danced. They had no spectators but the apple-pickers on the ladders. They were very glad to please them, but they danced to please themselves (or at least you would have supposed so); and you could no more help admiring than they could help dancing. How they did dance!

Not like opera-dancers. Not at all. And not like Madam Anybody's finished pupils. Not the least. It was not quadrille dancing, nor minuet dancing, nor even country-dance dancing. It was neither in the old style, nor the new style, nor the French style, nor the English style: though it may have been, by accident, a trifle in the Spanish style, which is a free and joyous one, I am told, deriving a delightful air of off hand inspiration from the chirping little castanets. As they danced among the orchard trees, and down the groves of stems and back again, and twirled each other lightly round and round, the influence of their airy motion seemed to spread and spread in the sun-lighted scene, like an expanding circle in the water. Their streaming hair and fluttering skirts, the elastic grass beneath their feet, the boughs that rustled in the morning air—the flashing leaves, the speckled shadows on the soft green ground—the balmy wind that swept along the landscape, glad to turn the distant windmill cheerily—everything between the two girls and the man and team at plow upon the ridge of land, where they showed against the sky as if they were the last things in the world, seemed dancing too.

At last the younger of the dancing sisters, out of breath and laughing gayly, threw herself upon a bench to rest. The other leaned against a tree hard by. The music, a wandering harp and fiddle, left off with a flourish, as if it boasted of its freshness; though the truth is, it had gone at such a pace and worked itself to such a pitch of competition with the dancing that it never could have held on half a minute longer. The apple-pickers on the ladders raised a hum and murmur of applause, and then, in keeping with the sound, bestirred themselves to work again like bees.

The more actively, perhaps, because an elderly gentleman, who was no other than Dr. Jeddler himself—it was Dr. Jeddler's house and orchard, you should know, and these were Dr. Jeddler's daughters—came



"BY THE BYE, . . . I SUPPOSE IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY."

C.S.

bustling out to see what was the matter, and who the deuce played music on his property before breakfast. For he was a great philosopher, Dr. Jeddler, and not very musical.

"Music and dancing to-day!" said the doctor, stopping short and speaking to himself. "I thought they dreaded to-day. But it's a world of contradictions. Why, Grace! why, Marion!" he added aloud, "is the world more mad than usual this morning?"

"Make some allowance for it, father, if it be," replied his younger daughter, Marion, going close to him and looking into his face, "for it's somebody's birthday."

"Somebody's birthday, puss?" replied the doctor. "Don't you know it's always somebody's birthday? Did you never hear how many new performers enter on this—ha! ha! ha!—it's impossible to speak gravely of it—on this preposterous and ridiculous business called life every minute?"

"No, father!"

"No, not you, of course; you're a woman—almost," said the doctor. "By the bye," and he looked into the pretty face, still close to his, "I suppose it's your birthday."

"No! Do you really, father?" cried his pet daughter, pursing up her red lips to be kissed.

"There! Take my love with it," said the doctor, imprinting his upon them; "and many happy returns of the—the idea!—of the day. The notion of wishing happy returns in such a farce as this," said the doctor to himself, "is good! Ha! ha! ha!"

Dr. Jeddler was, as I have said, a great philosopher, and the heart and mystery of his philosophy was to look upon the world as a gigantic practical joke; as something too absurd to be considered seriously by any rational man. His system of belief had been, in the beginning, part and parcel of the battle-ground on which he lived, as you shall presently understand.

"Well! But how did you get the music?" asked the doctor. "Poultry-stealers, of course! Where did the minstrels come from?"

"Alfred sent the music," said his daughter Grace, adjusting a few simple flowers in her sister's hair, with which, in her admiration of that youthful beauty, she had herself adorned it half an hour before, and which the dancing had disarranged.

"Oh! Alfred sent the music, did he?" returned the doctor.

"Yes. He met it coming out of the town as he was entering early. The men are traveling on foot, and rested there last night; and as it was Marion's birthday, and he thought it would please her, he sent them on with a penciled note to me, saying that if I thought so too they had come to serenade her."

"Ay, ay," said the doctor carelessly, "he always takes your opinion."

"And my opinion being favorable," said Grace good-humoredly, and pausing for a moment to admire the pretty head she decorated, with her own thrown back, "and Marion being in high spirits and beginning to dance, I joined her. And so we danced to Alfred's music till we were out of breath. And we thought the music all the gayer for being sent by Alfred. Didn't we, dear Marion?"

"Oh, I don't know, Grace. How you tease me about Alfred."

"Tease you by mentioning your lover?" said her sister.

"I am sure I don't much care to have him mentioned," said the willful beauty, stripping the petals from some flowers she held and scattering them on the ground. "I am almost tired of hearing of him; and as to his being my lover——"

"Hush! Don't speak lightly of a true heart which is all your own, Marion," cried her sister, "even in jest. There is not a truer heart than Alfred's in the world!"

"No—no," said Marion, raising her eyebrows with a pleasant air of careless consideration, "perhaps not. But I don't know that there's any great merit in that. I—I don't want him to be so very true. I never asked him. If he expects that I— But, dear Grace, why need we talk of him at all just now!"

It was agreeable to see the graceful figures of the blooming sisters, twined together, lingering among the trees, conversing thus, with earnestness opposed to lightness, yet with love responding tenderly to love. And it was very curious indeed to see the younger sister's eyes suffused with tears, and something fervently and deeply felt, breaking through the willfulness of what she said and striving with it painfully.

The difference between them, in respect of age, could not exceed four years at most; but Grace, as often happens in such cases when no mother watches over both (the doctor's wife was dead), seemed, in her gentle care of her young sister and in the steadiness of her devotion to her, older than she was; and more removed, in course of nature, from all competition with her, or participation, otherwise than through her sympathy and true affection, in her wayward fancies, than their ages seemed to warrant. Great character of mother that, even in this shadow and faint reflection of it, purifies the heart and raises the exalted nature nearer to the angels!

The doctor's reflections as he looked after them and heard the purport of their discourse were limited at first to certain merry meditations on the folly of all loves and likings, and the idle imposition practiced on themselves by young people who believed for a moment that there could be anything serious in such bubbles, and were always undeceived—always!

But the home-adorning, self-denying qualities of Grace, and her sweet temper, so gentle and retiring, yet including so much constancy and bravery of spirit, seemed all expressed to him in the contrast between her quiet household figure and that of his younger and more beautiful child; and he was sorry for her sake—sorry for them both—that life should be such a ridiculous business as it was. The doctor never dreamed of inquiring whether his children, or either of them, helped in any way to make the scheme a serious one. But then he was a philosopher.

A kind and generous man by nature, he had stumbled, by chance, over that common philosopher's stone (much more easily discovered than the object of the alchemist's researches) which sometimes trips up kind and generous men, and has the fatal property of turning gold to dross and every precious thing to poor account.

"Britain!" cried the doctor. "Britain! Halloo!"

A small man, with an uncommonly sour and discontented face, emerged from the house and returned to this call the unceremonious acknowledgment of "Now then!"

"Where's the breakfast-table?" said the doctor.

"In the house," returned Britain.

"Are you going to spread it out here, as you were told last night?" said the doctor. "Don't you know that there are gentlemen coming? That there's business to be done this morning before the coach comes by? That this is a very particular occasion?"

"I couldn't do anything, Dr. Jeddler, till the women had done getting in the apples, could I?" said Britain, his voice rising with his reasoning, so that it was very loud at last.

"Well, have they done now?" replied the doctor, looking at his watch and clapping his hands. "Come! make haste! Where's Clemency?"

"Here am I, mister," said a voice from one of the ladders, which a pair of clumsy feet descended briskly. "It's all done now. Clear away, gals. Everything shall be ready for you in half a minute, mister."

With that she began to bustle about most vigorously; presenting, as she did so, an appearance sufficiently peculiar to justify a word of introduction.

She was about thirty years old, and had a sufficiently plump and cheerful face, though it was twisted up into an odd expression of tightness that made it comical. But the extraordinary homeliness of her gait and manner would have superseded any face in the world. To say that she had two left legs and somebody else's arms, and that all four limbs seemed to be out of joint and to start from perfectly wrong places when they were set in motion, is to offer the mildest outline of the reality. To say that she was perfectly content and satisfied with these arrangements, and regarded them as being no business of hers, and that she took her arms and legs as they came, and allowed them to dispose of themselves just as it happened, is to render faint justice to her equanimity. Her dress was a prodigious pair of self-willed shoes that never wanted to go where her feet went; blue stockings; a printed gown of many colors and the most hideous pattern procurable for money; and a white apron. She always wore short sleeves, and always had, by some accident, grazed elbows, in which she took so lively an interest that she was continually trying to turn them round and get impossible views of them. In general, a little cap placed somewhere on her head; though it was rarely to be met with in the place usually occupied in other subjects by that article of dress; but from head to foot she was scrupulously clean, and maintained a kind of dislocated tidiness. Indeed, her laudable anxiety to be tidy and compact in her own conscience as well as in the public eye gave rise to one of her most startling evolutions, which was to grasp herself sometimes by a sort of wooden handle (part of her clothing, and familiarly called a busk), and wrestle as it were with her garments until she fell into a symmetrical arrangement.

Such, in outward form and garb, was Clemency Newcome; who was supposed to have unconsciously originated a corruption of her own Christian name from Clementina (but nobody knew, for the deaf old mother, a very phenomenon of age, whom she had supported almost from a child, was dead, and she had no other relation); who now busied herself in preparing the table and who stood at intervals with her bare red arms crossed, rubbing her grazed elbows with opposite hands, and staring at it very composedly until she suddenly remembered something else she wanted and jogged off to fetch it.

"Here are them two lawyers a-coming, mister!" said Clemency in a tone of no very great good-will.

"Aha!" cried the doctor, advancing to the gate to meet them. "Good-morning, good-morning! Grace, my dear! Marion! Here are Messrs. Snitchey and Craggs. Where's Alfred?"

"He'll be back directly, father, no doubt," said Grace. "He had so much to do this morning in his preparations for departure that he was up and out by daybreak. Good-morning, gentlemen"

"Ladies!" said Mr. Snitchey, "for self and Craggs," who bowed, "good-morning! Miss," to Marion, "I kiss your hand." Which he did. "And I wish you"—which he might or might not, for he didn't look, at first sight, like a gentleman troubled with many warm outpourings of soul in behalf of other people—"a hundred happy returns of this auspicious day."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the doctor thoughtfully, with his hands in his pockets. "The great farce in a hundred acts!"

"You wouldn't, I am sure," said Mr. Snitchey, standing a small professional blue bag against one leg of the table, "cut the great farce short for this actress, at all events, Dr. Jeddler."

"No," returned the doctor. "God forbid! May she live to laugh at it as long as she can laugh, and then say, with the French wit, 'The farce is ended; draw the curtain.' "

"The French wit," said Mr. Snitchey, peeping sharply into his blue bag, "was wrong, Dr. Jeddler, and your philosophy is altogether wrong, depend upon it, as I have often told you. Nothing serious in life! What do you call law?"

"A joke," replied the doctor.

"Did you ever go to law?" dsked Mr. Snitchey, looking out of the blue bag.

"Never," returned the doctor.

"If you ever do," said Mr. Snitchey, "perhaps you'll alter that opinion."

Craggs, who seemed to be represented by Snitchey, and to be conscious of little or no separate existence or personal individuality, offered a remark of his own in this place. It involved the only idea of which he did not stand seized and possessed in equal moieties with Snitchey; but he had some partners in it among the wise men of the world.

"It's made a great deal too easy," said Mr. Craggs.

"Law is?" asked the doctor.

"Yes," said Mr. Craggs, "everything is. Everything appears to me to be made too easy nowadays. It's the vice of these times. If the world is a joke (I am not prepared to say it isn't), it ought to be made a very difficult joke to crack. It ought to be as hard a struggle, sir, as possible. That's the intention. But it's being made far too easy. We are oiling the gates of life. They ought to be rusty. We shall have them beginning to turn soon with a smooth sound. Whereas they ought to grate upon their hinges, sir."

Mr. Craggs seemed positively to grate upon his own hinges as he delivered this opinion; to which he communicated immense effect—being a cold, hard, dry man, dressed in gray and white, like a flint; with small twinkles in his eyes, as if something struck sparks out of them. The three natural kingdoms, indeed, had each a fanciful representative among this brotherhood of disputants; for Snitchey was like a magpie or raven (only not so sleek), and the doctor had a streaked face like a winter pippin, with here and there a dimple to express the peckings of the birds, and a very little bit of pigtail behind that stood for the stalk.

As the active figure of a handsome young man, dressed for a journey and followed by a porter bearing several packages and baskets, entered the orchard at a brisk pace, and with an air of gayety and hope that accorded well with the morning, these three drew together like the brothers of the sister Fates, or like the Graces most effectually disguised, or like the three weird prophets on the heath, and greeted him.

"Happy return, Alf!" said the doctor lightly.

"A hundred happy returns of this auspicious day, Mr. Heathfield!" said Snatchey, bowing low.

"Returns!" Craggs murmured in a deep voice all alone.

"Why, what a battery!" exclaimed Alfred, stopping short, "and one—two—three—all foreboders of no good, in the great sea before me. I am glad you are not the first I have met this morning: I should have taken it for a bad omen. But Grace was the first—sweet, pleasant Grace—so I defy you all!"

"If you please, mister, I was the first, you know," said Clemency Newcome. "She was walking out here before sunrise, you remember. I was in the house."

"That's true! Clemency was the first," said Alfred. "So I defy you with Clemency."

"Ha! ha! ha!—for self and Craggs," said Snitchey. "What a defiance!"

"Not so bad a one as it appears, maybe," said Alfred, shaking hands heartily with the doctor, and also with Snitchey and Craggs, and then looking round. "Where are the— Good heavens!"

With a start, productive for the moment of a closer partnership between Jonathan Snitchey and Thomas Craggs than the subsisting articles of agreement in that wise contemplated, he hastily betook himself to where the sisters stood together, and—however, I needn't more particularly explain his manner of saluting Marion first and Grace afterward than by hinting that Mr. Craggs may possibly have considered it "too easy."

Perhaps to change the subject, Dr. Jeddler made a hasty move toward the breakfast, and they all sat down at table. Grace presided; but so discreetly stationed herself as to cut off her sister and Alfred from the rest of the company. Snitchey and Craggs sat at opposite corners with the blue bag between them for safety; the doctor took his usual position opposite Grace. Clemency hovered galvanically about the table as waitress; and the melancholy Britain, at another and a smaller board, acted as grand carver of a round of beef and a ham.

"Meat?" said Britain, approaching Mr. Snitchey, with the carving knife and fork in his hands, and throwing the question at him like a missile.

"Certainly," returned the lawyer.

"Do you want any?" to Craggs.

"Lean and well done," replied that gentleman.

Having executed these orders and moderately supplied the doctor (he seemed to know that nobody else wanted anything to eat), he lingered as near the firm as he decently could, watching with an austere eye their disposition of the viands, and but once relaxing the severe expression of his face. This was on the occasion of Mr. Craggs, whose teeth were not of the best, partially choking, when he cried out with great animation, "I thought he was gone!"

"Now, Alfred," said the doctor, "for a word or two of business while we are yet at breakfast."

"While we are yet at breakfast," said Snitchey and Craggs, who seemed to have no present idea of leaving off.

Although Alfred had not been breakfasting and seemed to have quite enough business on his hands as it was, he respectfully answered:

"If you please, sir."

"If anything could be serious," the doctor began, "in such a——"

"Farce as this, sir," hinted Alfred.

"In such a farce as this," observed the doctor, "it might be this recurrence, on the eve of separation, of a double birthday, which is connected with many associations pleasant to us four, and with the recollection of a long and amicable intercourse. That's not to the purpose."

"Ah! yes, yes, Dr. Jeddler," said the young man. "It is to the purpose. Much to the purpose, as my heart bears witness this morning; and as yours does too, I know, if you would let it speak. I leave your house to-day; I cease to be your ward to-day; we part with tender relations stretching far behind us, that never can be exactly renewed, and with others dawning yet before us," he looked down at Marion beside him, "fraught with such considerations as I must not trust myself to speak of now. Come, come!" he added, rallying his spirits and the doctor at once, "there's a serious grain in this large foolish dust-heap, doctor. Let us allow to-day that there is one."

"To-day!" cried the doctor. "Hear him! Ha! ha! ha! Of all days in the foolish year. Why, on this day the great battle was fought on this ground. On this ground where we now sit, where I saw my two girls dance this morning, where the fruit has just been gathered for our eating from these trees, the roots of which are struck in men, not earth—so many lives were lost that within my recollection, generations afterward, a churchyard full of bones and dust of bones and chips of cloven skulls has been dug up from underneath our feet here. Yet not a hundred people in that battle knew for what they fought, or why; not a hundred of the inconsiderate rejoicers in the victory why they rejoiced. Not half a hundred people were the better for the gain or loss. Not half a dozen men agree to this hour on the cause or merits; and nobody, in short, ever knew anything distinct about it but the mourners of the slain. Serious, too!" said the doctor, laughing. "Such a system!"

"But all this seems to me," said Alfred, "to be very serious."

"Serious!" cried the doctor. "If you allowed such things to be serious you must go mad, or die, or climb up to the top of a mountain and turn hermit."

"Besides—so long ago," said Alfred.

"Long ago!" returned the doctor. "Do you know what the world has been doing ever since? Do you know what else it has been doing? I don't!"

"It has gone to law a little," observed Mr. Snitchey, stirring his tea.

"Although the way out has been always made too easy," said his partner.

"And you'll excuse my saying, doctor, pursued Mr. Snitchey, "having been already put a thousand times in possession of my opinion, in the course of our discussions, that in its having gone to law and in its legal system altogether, I do observe a serious side—now, really, a something tangible, and with a purpose and intention in it——"

Clemency Newcome made an angular tumble against the table, occasioning a sounding clatter among the cups and saucers.

"Heyday! what's the matter there?" exclaimed the doctor.

"It's this evil-inclined blue bag," said Clemency, "always tripping up somebody!"

"With a purpose and intention in it, I was saying," resumed Snitchey, "that command respect. Life a farce, Dr. Jeddler? With law in it?"

The doctor laughed and looked at Alfred.

"Granted, if you please, that war is foolish," said Snitchey, "There we agree. For example. Here's a smiling country," pointing it out with his fork, "once overrun by soldiers—trespassers every man of 'em—and laid waste by fire and sword. He! he! he! The idea of any man exposing himself voluntarily to fire and sword! Stupid, wasteful, positively ridiculous; you laugh at your fellow-creatures, you know, when you think of it! But take this smiling country as it stands. Think of the laws appertaining to real property; to the bequest and devise of real property; to the mortgage and redemption of real property; to leasehold, freehold, and copyhold estate; think," said Mr. Snitchey, with such great emotion that he actually smacked his lips, "of the complicated laws relating to title and proof of title, with all the contradictory precedents and numerous acts of Parliament connected with them; think of the infinite number of ingenious and iterminable chancery suits, to which this pleasant prospects may give rise; and acknowledge, Dr. Jeddler, that there is a green spot in the scheme about us! I believe," said Mr. Snitchey, looking at his partners, "that I speak for self and Craggs?"

Mr. Craggs having signified assent, Mr. Snitchey, somewhat freshened by his recent eloquence, observed that he would take a little more beef and another cup of tea.

"I don't stand up for life in general," he added, rubbing his hands and chuckling; "it's full of folly; full of something worse. Professions of trust, and confidence, and unselfishness, and all that! Bah! bah! bah! We see what they're worth. But you mustn't laugh at life; you've got a game to play; a very serious game indeed! Everybody's playing against you, you know, and you're playing against them. Oh! it's a very interesting thing. There are deep moves upon the board. You must only laugh, Dr. Jeddler, when you win—and then not much. He! he! he! And then not much," repeated Snitchey, rolling his head and winking his eye as if he would have added, "you may do this instead!"

"Well, Alfred!" cried the doctor, "what do you say now?"

"I say, sir," replied Alfred, "that the greatest favor you could do me, and yourself too, I am inclined to think, would be to try sometimes to forget this battle-field and others like it in that broader battle-field of life on which the sun looks every day."

"Really, I'm afraid that wouldn't soften his opinions, Mr. Alfred," said Snitchey. "The combatants are very eager and very bitter in that same battle of life. There's a great deal of cutting and slashing, and firing into people's heads from behind. There is terrible treading down and trampling on. It is rather a bad business."

"I believe, Mr. Snitchey," said Alfred, "there are quiet victories and struggles, great sacrifices of self, and noble acts of heroism in it—even in many of its apparent lightnesses and contradictions—not the less difficult to achieve because they have no earthly chronicle or audience—done every day in nooks and corners, and in little households, and in men's and women's hearts—any one of which might reconcile the sternest man to such a world, and fill him with belief and hope in it, though two-fourths of its people were at war and another fourth at law; and that's a bold word."

Both the sisters listened keenly.

"Well, well!" said the doctor, "I am too old to be converted, even by my friend Snitchey here, or my good spinster sister, Martha Jeddler; who had what she calls her domestic trials ages ago, and has led a sympathizing life with all sorts of people ever since; and who is so much of your opinion (only she's less reasonable and more obstinate, being a woman) that we can't agree and seldom meet. I was born upon this battle-field. I began as a boy to have my thoughts directed to the real history of a battle-field. Sixty years have gone over my head, and I have never seen the Christian world, including Heaven knows how many loving mothers and good enough girls like mine here, anything but mad for a battle-field. The same contradictions prevail in everything. One must either laugh or cry at such stupendous inconsistencies; and I prefer to laugh."

Britain, who had been paying the profoundest and most melancholy attention to each speaker in his turn, seemed suddenly to decide in favor of the same preference, if a deep sepulchral sound that escaped him might be construed into a demonstration of risibility. His face, however, was so perfectly unaffected by it, both before and afterward, that although one or two of the breakfast party looked round as being startled by a mysterious noise, nobody connected the offender with it.

Except his partner in attendance, Clemency Newcome; who rousing him with one of those favorite joints, her elbows, inquired in a reproachful whisper what he laughed at.

"Not you!" said Britain.

"Who then?"

"Humanity," said Britain. "That's the joke!"

"What between master and them lawyers, he's getting more and more addle-headed every day!" cried Clemency, giving him a lunge with the other elbow as a mental stimulant. "Do you know where you are? Do you want to get warning?"

"I don't know anything," said Britain with a leaden eye and an immovable visage. "I don't care for anything. I don't make out anything. I don't believe anything. And I don't want anything."

Although this forlorn summary of his general condition may have been overcharged in an access of despondency, Benjamin Britain—sometimes called Little Britain, to distinguish him from Great; as we might say Young England, to express Old England with a decided difference--had defined his real state more accurately than might be supposed. For, serving as a sort of man Miles to the doctor's Friar Bacon, and listening day after day to innumerable orations addressed by the doctor to various people, all tending to show that his very existence was at best a mistake and an absurdity, this unfortuate servitor had fallen by degrees into such an abyss of confused and contradictory suggestions from within and without that Truth at the bottom of her well was on the level surface as compared with Britain in the depths of his mystification. The only point he clearly comprehended was that the new element usually brought into these discussions by Snitchey and Craggs never served to make them clearer, and always seemed to give the doctor a species of advantage and confirmation. Therefore he looked upon the firm as one of the proximate causes of his state of mind, and held them in abhorrence accordingly.

"But this is not our business, Alfred," said the doctor. "Ceasing to be my ward (as you have said) to-day, and leaving us full to the brim of such learning as the grammar school down here was able to give you and your studies in London could add to that, and such practical knowledge as a dull old country doctor like myself could graft upon both, you are away now into the world. The first term of probation appointed by your poor father being over away you go now, your own master, to fulfill his second desire. And long before your three years' tour among the foreign schools of medicine is finished you'll have forgotten us. Lord, you'll forget us easily in six months!"

"If I do— But you know better; why should I speak to you?" said Alfred, laughing.

"I don't know anything of the sort," returned the doctor. "What do you say, Marion?"

Marion, trifling with her teacup, seemed to say—but she didn't say it—that he was welcome to forget, if he could. Grace pressed the blooming face against her cheek and smiled.

"I haven't been, I hope, a very unjust steward in the execution of my trust," pursued the doctor; "but I am to be, at any rate, formally discharged and released and what not this morning; and here are our good friends Snitchey and Craggs, with a bagful of papers, and accounts, and documents, for the transfer of the balance of the trust fund to you (I wish it was a more difficult one to dispose of, Alfred, but you must get to be a great man and make it so), and other drolleries of that sort, which are to be signed, sealed, and delivered."

"And duly witnessed as by law required," said Snitchey, pushing away his plate and taking out the papers, which his partner proceeded to spread upon the table; "and self and Craggs having been co-trustees with you, doctor, in so far as the fund was concerned, we shall want your two servants to attest the signatures—can you read, Mrs. Newcome?"

"I ain't married, mister," said Clemency.

"Oh! I beg your pardon. I should think not," chuckled Snitchey, casting his eyes over her extraordinary figure. "You can read?"

"A little," answered Clemency.

"The marriage service night and morning, eh?" observed the lawyer jocosely.

"No," said Clemency. "Too hard. I only reads a thimble."

"Read a thimble!" echoed Snitchey. "What are you talking about, young woman?"

Clemency nodded. "And a nutmeg-grater."

"Why, this is a lunatic! a subject for the lord high chancellor!" said Snitchey, staring at her.

"If possessed of any property," stipulated Craggs.

Grace, however, interposing, explained that each of the articles in question bore an engraved motto, and so formed the pocket library of Clemency Newcome, who was not much given to the study of books.

"Oh, that's it, is it, Miss Grace!" said Snitchey.

"Yes, yes. Ha! ha! ha! I thought our friend was an idiot. She looks uncommonly like it," he muttered with a supercilious glance. "And what does the thimble say, Mrs. Newcome?"

"I ain't married, mister," observed Clemency.

"Well, Newcome. Will that do?" said the lawyer. "What does the thimble say, Newcome?"

How Clemency, before replying to this question, held one pocket open, and looked down into its yawning depths for the thimble which wasn't there—and how she then held an opposite pocket open, and seeming to descry it like a pearl of great price at the bottom, cleared away such intervening obstacles as a handkerchief, an end of wax candle, a flushed apple, an orange, a lucky penny, a cramp bone, a padlock, a pair of scissors in a sheath more expressively describable as promising young shears, a handful or so of loose beads, several balls of cotton, a needle-case, a cabinet collection of curl-papers, and a biscuit, all of which articles she intrusted individually and separately to Britain to hold—is of no consequence.

Nor how, in her determination to grasp this pocket by the throat and keep it prisoner (for it had a tendency to swing and twist itself round the nearest corner), she assumed, and calmly maintained, an attitude apparently inconsistent with the human anatomy and the laws of gravity. It is enough that at last she triumphantly produced the thimble on her finger and rattled the nutmeg-grater: the literature of both those trinkets being obviously in course of wearing out and wasting away through excessive friction.

"That's the thimble, is it, young woman?" said Mr. Snitchey, diverting himself at her expense. "And what does the thimble say?"

"It says," replied Clemency, reading slowly round as if it were a tower, "For get and for-give."

Snitchey and Craggs laughed heartily. "So new!" said Snitchey. "So easy!" said Craggs. "Such a knowledge of human nature in it!" said Snitchey. "So applicable to the affairs of life!" said Craggs.

"And the nutmeg-grater?" inquired the head of the firm.

"The grater says," returned Clemency, "Do as you—would—be—done by."

"Do, or you'll be done brown, you mean," said Mr. Snitchey.

"I don't understand," retorted Clemency, shaking her head vaguely. "I ain't no lawyer."

"I am afraid that if she was, doctor," said Mr. Snitchey, turning to him suddenly as if to anticipate any effect that might otherwise be consequent on this retort, "she'd find it to be the golden rule of half her clients. They are serious enough in that—whimsical as your world is—and lay the blame on us afterward. We, in our profession, are little else than mirrors, after all, Mr. Alfred; but we are generally consulted by angry and quarrelsome people who are not in their best looks, and it's rather hard to quarrel with us if we reflect unpleasant aspects. I think," said Mr. Snitchey, "that I speak for self and Craggs?"

"Decidedly," said Craggs.

"And so if Mr. Britain will oblige us with a mouthful of ink," said Mr. Snitchey, returning to the papers, "we'll sign, seal, and deliver as soon as possible, or the coach will be coming past before we know where we are."

If one might judge from his appearance, there was every probability of the coach coming past before Mr. Britain knew where he was; for he stood in a state of abstraction, mentally balancing the doctor against the lawyers, and the lawyers against the doctor, and their clients against both, and engaged in feeble attempts to make the thimble and nutmeg-grater (a new idea to him) square with anybody's system of philosophy; and, in short, bewildering himself as much as ever his great namesake has done with theories and schools. But Clemency, who was his good genius—though he had the meanest possible opinion of her understanding, by reason of her seldom troubling herself with abstract speculations, and being always at hand to do the right thing at the right time—having produced the ink in a twinkling, tendered him the further service of recalling him to himself by the application of her elbows; with which gentle flappers she so jogged his memory, in a more literal construction of that phrase than usual, that he soon became quite fresh and brisk.

How he labored under an apprehension not uncommon to persons in his degree, to whom the use of pen and ink is an event, that he couldn't append his name to a document, not of his own writing, without commiting himself in some shadowy manner, or somehow signing away vague and enormous sums of money; and how he approached the deeds under protest and by dint of the doctor's coercion, and insisted on pausing to look at them before writing (the cramped hand, to say nothing of the phraseology, being so much Chinese to him), and also on turning them round to see whether there was anything fraudulent underneath; and how, having signed his name, he became desolate as one who had parted with his property and rights; I want the time to tell. Also, how the blue bag containing his signature afterward had a mysterious interest for him, and he couldn't leave it; also, how Clemency Newcome, in an ecstasy of laughter at the idea of her own importance and dignity, brooded over the whole table with her two elbows like a spread eagle, and reposed her head upon her left arm as a preliminary to the formation of certain cabalistic characters, which required a deal of ink, and imaginary counterparts whereof she executed at the same time with her tongue. Also, how, having once tasted ink, she became thirsty in that regard, as tame tigers are said to be after tasting another sort of fluid, and wanted to sign everything and put her name in all kinds of places. In brief, the doctor was discharged of his trust and all its responsibilities; and Alfred, taking it on himself, was fairly started on the journey of life.

"Britain!" said the doctor. "Run to the gate and watch for the coach. Time flies, Alfred."

"Yes, sir, yes," returned the young man hurriedly. "Dear Grace! a moment! Marion—so young and beautiful, so winning and so much admired, dear to my heart as nothing else in life is—remember! I leave Marion to you!"

"She has always been a sacred charge to me, Alfred. She is doubly so now. I will be faithful to my trust, believe me."

"I do believe it, Grace. I know it well. Who could look upon your face, and hear your voice, and not know it! Ah, Grace! If I had your well-governed heart and tranquil mind, how bravely I would leave this place to-day!"

"Would you?" she answered with a quiet smile.

"And yet, Grace—sister, seems the natural word."

"Use it!" she said quickly. "I am glad to hear it. Call me nothing else."

"And yet, sister, then," said Alfred, "Marion and I had better have your true and steadfast qualities serving us here, and making us both happier and better. I wouldn't carry them away to sustain myself if I could!"

"Coach upon the hill-top!" exclaimed Britain.

"Time flies, Alfred," said the doctor.

Marion had stood apart, with her eyes fixed upon the ground; but this warning being given, her young lover brought her tenderly to where her sister stood and gave her into her embrace.

"I have been telling Grace, dear Marion," he said, "that you are her charge; my precious trust at parting. And when I come back and reclaim you, dearest, and the bright prospect of our married life lies stretched before us, it shall be one of our chief pleasures to consult how we can make Grace happy; how we can anticipate her wishes; how we can show our gratitude and love to her; how we can return her something of the debt she will have heaped upon us."

The younger sister had one hand in his; the other rested on her sister's neck. She looked into that sister's eyes, so calm, serene, and cheerful, with a gaze in which affection, admiration, sorrow, wonder, almost veneration, were blended. She looked into that sister's face as if it were the face of some bright angel. Calm, serene, and cheerful, the face looked back on her and on her lover.

"And when the time comes, as it must one day," said Alfred—"I wonder it has never come yet, but Grace knows best, for Grace is always right—when she will want a friend to open her whole heart to, and to be to her something of what she has been to us—then, Marion, how faithful we will prove, and what delight to us to know that she, our dear good sister, loves and is loved again as we would have her!"

Still the younger sister looked into her eyes and turned not—even toward him. And still those honest eyes looked back so calm, serene, and cheerful on herself and on her lover.

"And when all that is past, and we are old, and living (as we must!) together—close together—talking often of old times," said Alfred—"these shall be our favorite times among them—this day most of all; and telling each other what we thought and felt and hoped and feared at parting; and how we couldn't bear to say good-by——"

"Coach coming through the wood!" cried Britain.

"Yes! I am ready—and how we met again so happily in spite of all; we'll make this day the happiest in all the year, and keep it as a treble birthday. Shall we, dear?"

"Yes!" interposed the elder sister eagerly, and with a radiant smile. "Yes! Alfred, don't linger. There's no time. Say good-by to Marion. And Heaven be with you!"

He pressed the younger sister to his heart. Released from his embrace she again clung to her sister; and her eyes, with the same blended look, again sought those so calm, serene, and cheerful.

"Farewell, my boy!" said the doctor. "To talk about any serious correspondence or serious affections and engagements, and so forth, in such a—ha! ha! ha!—you know what I mean—why that, of course, would be sheer nonsense. All I can say is, that if you and Marion should continue in the same foolish minds I shall not object to have you for a son-in-law one of these days."

"Over the bridge!" cried Britain.

"Let it come!" said Alfred, wringing the doctor's hand stoutly. "Think of me sometimes, my old friend and guardian, as seriously as you can! Adieu, Mr. Snitchey! Farewell, Mr. Craggs!"

"Coming down the road!" cried Britain.

"A kiss of Clemency Newcome for long acquaintance' sake! Shake hands, Britain! Marion, dearest heart, good-by! Sister Grace! remember!"

The quiet household figure and the face so beautiful in its serenity were turned toward him in reply; but Marion's look and attitude remained unchanged.

The coach was at the gate. There was a bustle with the luggage. The coach drove away. Marion never moved.

"He waves his hat to you, my love," said Grace. "Your chosen husband, darling. Look!"

The younger sister raised her head and for a moment turned it. Then, turning back again, and fully meeting for the first time those calm eyes, fell sobbing on her neck.

"Oh, Grace, God bless you! But I cannot bear to see it, Grace! It breaks my heart."

PART THE SECOND.

SNITCHEY & CRAGGS had a snug little office on the old battle-ground, where they drove a snug little business and fought a great many small pitched battles for a great many contending parties. Though it could hardly be said of these conflicts that they were running fights—for in truth they generally proceeded at a snail's pace—the part the firm had in them came so far within the general denomination that now they took a shot at this plaintiff, and now aimed a chop at that defendant, now made a heavy charge at an estate in Chancery, and now had some light skirmishing among an irregular body of small debtors, just as the occasion served and the enemy happened to present himself. The gazette was an important and profitable feature in some of their fields, as in fields of greater renown; and in most of the actions wherein they showed their generalship it was afterward observed by the combatants that they had had great difficulty in making each other out, or in knowing with any degree of distinctness what they were about in consequence of the vast amount of smoke by which they were surrounded.

The offices of Messrs. Snitchey & Craggs stood convenient, with an open door down two smooth steps, in the market-place; so that any angry farmer inclining toward hot water might tumble into it at once. Their special council-chamber and hall of conference was an old back room upstairs, with a low dark ceiling, which seemed to be knitting its brows gloomily in the consideration of tangled points of law. It was furnished with some high-backed leathern chairs, garnished with great goggle-eyed brass nails, of which, every here and there, two or three had fallen out—or had been picked out, perhaps, by the wandering thumbs and forefingers of bewildered clients. There was a framed print of a great judge in it, every curl in whose dreadful wig had made a man's hair stand on end. Bales of papers filled the dusty closets, shelves, and tables; and round the wainscot there were tiers of boxes, padlocked and fireproof, with people's names painted outside, which anxious visitors felt themselves, by a cruel enchantment, obliged to spell backward and forward and to make anagrams of while they sat seeming to listen to Snitchey & Craggs without comprehending one word of what they said.

Snitchey & Craggs had each in private life as in professional existence a partner of his own. Snitchey & Craggs were the best friends in the world and had a real confidence in one another; but Mrs. Snitchey, by a dispensation not uncommon in the affairs of life, was on principle suspicious of Mr. Craggs; and Mrs. Craggs was on principle suspicious of Mr. Snitchey. "Your Snitcheys indeed," the latter lady would observe sometimes to Mr. Craggs; using that imaginative plural as if in disparagement of an objectionable pair of pantaloons or other articles not possessed of a singular number; "I don't see what you want with your Snitcheys, for my part. You trust a great deal too much to your Snitcheys, I think, and I hope you may never find my words come true." While Mrs. Snitchey would observe to Mr. Snitchey, of Craggs, that "if ever he was led away by man he was led away by that man, and that if ever she read a double purpose in a mortal eye, she read that purpose in Craggs' eye." Notwithtanding this, however, they were all very good friends in general: and Mrs. Snitchey and Mrs. Craggs maintained a close bond of alliance against "the office," which they both considered the blue chamber and common enemy, full of dangerous (because unknown) machinations.

In this office, nevertheless, Snitchey & Craggs made honey for their several hives. Here, sometimes, they would linger of a fine evening at the window of their council-chamber overlooking the old battle-ground, and wonder (but that was generally at assize time, when much business had made them sentimental) at the folly of mankind, who couldn't always be at peace with one another and go to law comfortably. Here days, and weeks, and months, and years passed over them; their calendar, the gradually diminishing number of brass nails in the leather chairs, and the increasing bulk of papers on the tables. Here, nearly three years' flight had thinned the one and swelled the other since the breakfast in the orchard; when they sat together in consultation at night.

Not alone; but with a man of thirty, or about that time of life, negligently dressed and somewhat haggard in the face, but well made, well attired, and well looking, who sat in the arm-chair of state, with one hand in his breast and the other in his disheveled hair, pondering moodily. Messrs. Snitchey & Craggs sat opposite each other at a neighboring desk. One of the fireproof boxes, unpadlocked and opened, was upon it; a part of its contents lay strewn upon the table, and the rest was then in course of passing through the hands of Mr. Snitchey; who brought it to the candle, document by document; looked at every paper singly as he produced it; shook his head, and handed it to Mr. Craggs; who looked it over also, shook his head, and laid it down. Sometimes they would stop, and shaking their heads in concert, look toward the abstracted client. And the name on the box being Michael Warden, Esquire, we may conclude from these premises that the name and the box were both his, and that the affairs of Michael Warden, Esquire, were in a bad way.

"That's all," said Mr. Snitchey, turning up the last paper. "Really, there's no other resource. No other resource."

"All lost, spent, wasted, pawned, borrowed, and sold, eh?" said the client, looking up.

"All," returned Mr. Snitchey.

"Nothing else to be done, you say?"

"Nothing at all."

The client bit his nails and pondered again.

"And I am not even personally safe in England? You hold to that, do you?"

"In no part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland," replied Mr. Snitchey.

"A mere prodigal son with no father to go back to, no swine to keep, and no husks to share with them? Eh?" pursued the client, rocking one leg over the other and searching the ground with his eyes.

Mr. Snitchey coughed as if to deprecate the being supposed to participate in any figurative illustration of a legal position. Mr. Craggs, as if to express that it was a partnership view of the subject, also coughed.

"Ruined at thirty!" said the client. "Humph!"

"Not ruined, Mr. Warden," returned Snitchey. "Not so bad as that. You have done a good deal toward it, I must say, but you are not ruined. A little nursing——"

"A little devil," said the client.

"Mr. Craggs," said Snitchey, "will you oblige me with a pinch of snuff? Thank you, sir."

As the imperturbable lawyer applied it to his nose with great apparent relish and a perfect absorption of his attention in the proceeding, the client gradually broke into a smile and looking up said:

"You talk of nursing. How long nursing?"

"How long nursing?" repeated Snitchey, dusting the snuff from his fingers and making a slow calculation in his mind. "For your involved estate, sir? In good hands? S. & C.'s, say? Six or seven years."

"To starve for six or seven years!" said the client with a fretful laugh and an impatient change of his position.

"To starve for six or seven years, Mr. Warden," said Snitchey, "would be very uncommon indeed. You might get another estate by showing yourself the while. But we don't think you could do it—speaking for self and Craggs—and consequently don't advise it."

"What do you advise?"

"Nursing, I say," repeated Snitchey. "Some few years of nursing by self and Craggs would bring it round. But to enable us to make terms, and hold terms, and you to keep terms, you must go away; you must live abroad. As to starvation, we could insure you some hundreds a year to starve upon, even in the beginning—I dare say, Mr. Warden."

"Hundreds," said the client. "And I have spent thousands!"

"That," retorted Mr. Snitchey, putting the papers slowly back into the cast-iron box, "there is no doubt about. No doubt a—bout," he repeated to himself as he thoughtfully pursued his occupation.

The lawyer very likely knew his man; at any rate his dry, shrewd, whimsical manner had a favorable influence on the client's moody state and disposed him to be more free and unreserved. Or perhaps the client knew his man and had elicited such encouragement as he had received, to render some purpose he was about to disclose the more defensible in appearance. Gradually raising his head he sat looking at his immovable adviser with a smile, which presently broke into a laugh.

"After all," he said, "my iron-headed friend——"

Mr. Snitchey pointed out his partner. "Self and—excuse me—Craggs."

"I beg Mr. Craggs' pardon," said the client. "After all, my iron-headed friends," he leaned forward in his chair and dropped his voice a little, "you don't know half my ruin yet."

Mr. Snitchey stopped and stared at him. Mr. Craggs also stared.

"I am not only deep in debt," said the client, "but I am deep in——"

"Not in love!" cried Snitchey.

"Yes!" said the client, falling back in his chair and surveying the firm with his hands in his pockets. "Deep in love."

"And not with an heiress, sir?" said Snitchey.

"Not with an heiress."

"Nor a rich lady?"

"Nor a rich lady that I know of—except in beauty and merit."

"A single lady, I trust?" said Mr. Snitchey with great expression.

"Certainly."

"It's not one of Dr. Jeddler's daughters?" said Snitchey, suddenly squaring his elbows on his knees and advancing his face at least a yard.

"Yes!" returned the client.

"Not his younger daughter?" said Snitchey.

"Yes!" returned the client.

"Mr. Craggs," said Snitchey, much relieved, "will you oblige me with another pinch of snuff? Thank you! I am happy to say it don't signify, Mr. Warden; she's engaged, sir, she's bespoke. My partner can corroborate me. We know the fact."

"We know the fact," repeated Craggs.

"Why, so do I, perhaps," returned the client quietly. "What of that? Are you men of the world, and did you never hear of a woman changing her mind?"

"There certainly have been actions for breach," said Mr. Snitchey, "brought against both spinsters and widows, but in the majority of cases——"

"Cases!" interposed the client impatiently. "Don't talk to me of cases. The general precedent is in a much larger volume than any of your law books. Besides, do you think I have lived six weeks in the doctor's house for nothing?"

"I think, sir," observed Mr. Snitchey, gravely addressing himself to his partner, "that of all the scrapes Mr. Warden's horses have brought him into at one time and another—and they have been pretty numerous and pretty expensive, as none know better than himself, and you, and I—the worst scrape may turn out to be, if he talks in this way, his having ever been left by one of them at the doctor's garden wall, with three broken ribs, a snapped collar-bone, and the Lord knows how many bruises. We didn't think so much of it at the time when we knew he was going on well under the doctor's hands and roof; but it looks bad now, sir. Bad? It looks very bad. Dr. Jeddler too—our client, Mr. Craggs."

"Mr. Alfred Heathfield too—a sort of client, Mr. Snitchey," said Craggs.

"Mr. Michael Warden too, a kind of client," said the careless visitor, "and no bad one either: having played the fool for ten or twleve years. However, Mr. Michael Warden has sown his wild oats now—there's their crop in that box; and he means to repent and be wise. And in proof of it, Mr. Michael Warden means, if he can, to marry Marion, the doctor's lovely daughter, and to carry her away with him."

"Really, Mr. Craggs——" Snitchey began.

"Really, Mr. Snitchey, and Mr. Craggs, partners both," said the client, interupting him; "you know your duty to your clients, and you know well enough, I am sure, that it is no part of it to interfere in a mere love affair which I am obliged to confide to you. I am not going to carry the young lady off without her own consent. There's nothing illegal in it. I never was Mr. Heathfield's bosom friend. I violate no confidence of his. I love where he loves, and I mean to win where he would win, if I can."

"He can't, Mr. Craggs," said Snitchey, evidently anxious and discomfited. "He can't do it, sir. She dotes on Mr. Alfred."

"Does she?" returned the client.

"Mr. Craggs, she dotes on him, sir," persisted Snitchey.

"I didn't live six weeks, some few months ago, in the doctor's house for nothing; and I doubted that soon," observed the client. "She would have doted on him if her sister could have brought it about; but I watched them. Marion avoided his name, avoided the subject, shrank from the least allusion to it with evident distress."

"Why should she, Mr. Craggs, you know? Why should she, sir?" inquired Snitchey.

"I don't know why she should, though there are many likely reasons," said the client, smiling at the attention and perplexity expressed in Mr. Snitchey's shining eye and at his cautious way of carrying on the conversation, and making himself informed upon the subject; "but I know she does. She was very young when she made the engagement—if it may be called one; I am not even sure of that—and has repentetd of it, perhaps. Perhaps—it seems a foppish thing to say, but upon my soul I don't mean it in that light—she may have fallen in love with me as I have fallen in love with her."

"He! he! Mr. Alfred, her old playfellow too, you remember, Mr. Craggs," said Snitchey with a disconcerted laugh; "knew her almost from a baby!"

"Which makes it the more probable that she may be tired of his idea," calmly pursued the client, "and not indisposed to exchange it for the newer one of another lover, who presents himself (or is presented by his horse) under romantic circumstances; has the not unfavorable reputation—with a country girl—of having lived thoughtlessly and gayly without doing much harm to anybody; and who, for his youth and figure, and so forth—this may seem foppish again, but upon my soul I don't mean it in that light—might perhaps pass muster in a crowd with Mr. Alfred himself."

There was no gainsaying the last clause, certainly; and Mr. Snitchey, glancing at him, thought so. There was something naturally graceful and pleasant in the very carelessness of his air. It seemed to suggest, of his comely face and well-knit figure, that they might be greatly better if he chose: and that, once roused and made earnest (but he never had been earnest yet), he could be full of fire and purpose. "A dangerous sort of libertine," thought the shrewd lawyer, "to seem to catch the spark he wants from a young lady's eyes."

"Now, observe, Snitchey," he continued, rising and taking him by the button, "and Craggs," taking him by the button also, and placing one partner on either side of him so that neither might evade him. "I don't ask you for any advice. You are right to keep quite aloof from all parties in such a matter, which is not one in which grave men like you could interfere on any side. I am briefly going to review in half a dozen words my position and intention, and then I shall leave it to you to do the best for me in money matters that you can; seeing that, if I run away with the doctor's beautiful daughter (as I hope to do, and to become another man under her bright influence), it will be for the moment more chargeable than running away alone. But I shall soon make all that up in an altered life."

"I think it will be better not to hear this, Mr. Craggs?" said Snitchey, looking at him across the client.

"I think not," said Craggs. Both listened attentively.

"Well! You needn't hear it," replied their client. "I'll mention it, however. I don't mean to ask the doctor's consent, because he wouldn't give it me. But I mean to do the doctor no wrong or harm, because (besides there being nothing serious in such trifles, as he says) I hope to rescue his child, my Marion, from what I see—I know—she dreads and contemplates with misery: that is, the return of this old lover. If anything in the world is true it is true that she dreads his return. Nobody is injured so far. I am so harried and worried here just now that I lead the life of a flying-fish. I skulk about in the dark, I am shut out of my own house and warned off my own grounds; but that house, and those grounds, and many an acre besides will come back to me one day, as you know and say; and Marion will probably be richer—on your showing who are never sanguine—ten years hence as my wife than as the wife of Alfred Heathfield, whose return she dreads (remember that), and in whom or in any man my passion is not surpassed. Who is injured yet? It is a fair case throughout. My right is as good as his if she decide in my favor; and I will try my right by her alone. You will like to know no more after this, and I will tell you no more. Now you know my purpose and wants. When must I leave here?"

"In a week," said Snitchey. "Mr. Craggs?"

"In something less, I should say," responded Craggs.

"In a month," said the client, after attentively watching the two faces. "This day month. To-day is Thursday. Succeed or fail, on this day month I go."

"It's too long a delay," said Snitchey; "much too long. But let it be so. I thought he'd have stipulated for three," he murmured to himself. "Are you going? Good-night, sir!"

"Good-night!" returned the client, shaking hands with the firm. "You'll live to see me making a good use of riches yet. Henceforth the star of my destiny is Marion!"

"Take care of the stairs, sir," replied Snitchey; "for she don't shine there. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

So they both stood at the stair-head with a pair of office-candles, watching him down. When he had gone away they stood looking at each other.

"What do you think of all this, Mr. Craggs?" said Snitchey.

Mr. Craggs shook his head.

"It was our opinion on the day when that release was executed that there was something curious in the parting of that pair, I recollect," said Snitchey.

"It was," said Mr. Craggs.

"Perhaps he deceives himself altogether," pursued Mr. Snitchey, locking up the fireproof box and putting it away; "or, if he don't, a little bit of fickleness and perfidy is not a miracle, Mr. Craggs. And yet I thought that pretty face was very true. I thought," said Mr. Snitchey, putting on his great-coat (for the weather was very cold), drawing on his gloves, and snuffing out one candle, "that I had even seen her character becoming stronger and more resolved of late. More like her sister's."

"Mrs. Craggs was of the same opinion," returned Craggs.

"I'd really give a trifle to-night," observed Mr. Snitchey, who was a good-natured man, "if I could believe that Mr. Warden was reckoning without his host; but light-headed, capricious, and unballasted as he is, he knows something of the world and its people (he ought to, for he has bought what he does know dear enough): and I can't quite think that. We had better not interfere: we can do nothing, Mr. Craggs, but keep quiet."

"Nothing," returned Craggs.

"Our friend the doctor makes light of such things," said Mr. Snitchey, shaking his head. "I hope he mayn't stand in need of his philosophy. Our friend Alfred talks of the battle of life;" he shook his head again; "I hope he mayn't be cut down early in the day. Have you got your hat, Mr. Craggs? I am going to put the other candle out."

Mr. Craggs replying in the affirmative, Mr. Snitchey suited the action to the word and they groped their way out of the council-chamber, now dark as the subject or the law in general.

My story passes to a quiet little study, where on that same night the sisters and the hale old doctor sat by a cheerful fireside. Grace was working at her needle. Marion read aloud from a book before her. The doctor, in his dressing-gown and slippers, with his feet spread out upon the warm rug, leaned back in his easy-chair and listened to the book, and looked upon his daughters.

They were very beautiful to look upon. Two better faces for a fireside never made a fireside bright and sacred. Something of the difference between them had been softened down in three years' time; and enthroned upon the clear brow of the younger sister, looking through her eyes and thrilling in her voice, was the same earnest nature that her own motherless youth had ripened in the elder sister long ago. But she still appeared at once the lovelier and weaker of the two; still seemed to rest her head upon her sister's breast, and put her trust in her, and look into her eyes for counsel and reliance. Those loving eyes, so calm, serene, and cheerful as of old.

" 'And being in her own home,' " read Marion from the book, " 'her home made exquisitely dear by these remembrances, she now began to know that the great trial of her heart must soon come on and could not be delayed. Oh, home, our comforter and friend when others fall away, to part with whom at any step between the cradle and the grave——' "

"Marion, my love!" said Grace.

"Why, puss!" exclaimed her father, "what's the matter?"

She put her hand upon the hand her sister stretched toward her and read on; her voice still faltering and trembling, though shemade an effort to command it when thus interrupted.

" 'To part with whom at any step between the cradle and the grave is always sorrowful. Oh, home, so true to us, so often slighted in return, be lenient to them that turn away from thee, and do not haunt their erring footsteps too reproachfully! Let no kind looks, no well-remembered smiles, be seen upon thy phantom face. Let no ray of affection, welcome, gentleness, forbearance, cordiality, shine from thy white head. Let no old loving word or tone rise up in judgment against thy deserter; but if thou cans't look harshly and severely, do, in mercy to the penitent!' "

"Dear Marion, read no more to-night," said Grace—for she was weeping.

"I cannot," she replied and closed the book. "The words seem all on fire!"

The doctor was amused at this; and laughed as he patted her on the head.

"What! overcome by a story-book!" said Dr. Jeddler. "Print and paper! Well, well, it's all one. It's as rational to make a serious matter of print and paper as of anything else. But dry your eyes, love, dry your eyes. I dare say the heroine has got home again long ago and made it up all round—and if she hasn't, a real home is only four walls; and a fictitious one mere rags and ink. What's the matter now?"

"It's only me, mister," said Clemency, putting in her head at the door.

"And what's the matter with you?" said the doctor.

"Oh, bless you, nothing ain't the matter with me," returned Clemency—and truly too, to judge from her well-soaped face, in which there gleamed as usual the very soul of good-humor, which, ungainly as she was, made her quite engaging. Abrasions on the elbow are not generally understood, it is true, to range within that class of personal charms called beauty-spots. But it is better going through the world to have the arms chafed in that narrow passage than the temper: and Clemency's was sound and whole as any beauty's in the land.

"Nothing ain't the matter with me," said Clemency, entering, "but—come a little closer, mister."

The doctor in some astonishment complied with this invitation.

"You said I wasn't to give you one before them, you know," said Clemency.

A novice in the family might have supposed from her extraordinary ogling as she said it, as well as from a singular rapture or ecstasy which pervaded her elbows, as if she were embracing herself, that "one," in its most favorable interpretation, meant a chaste salute. Indeed, the doctor himself seemed alarmed for the moment; but quickly regained his composure as Clemency, having had recourse to both her pockets—beginning with the right one, going away to the wrong one, and afterward coming back to the right one again—produced a letter from the post-office.

"Britain was riding by on an errand," she chuckled, handing it to the doctor, "and see the mail come in and waited for it. There's A. H. in the corner. Mr. Alfred's on his journey home, I bet. We shall have a wedding in the house—there was two spoons in my saucer this morning. Oh, luck, how slow he opens it!"

All this she delivered by way of soliloquy, gradually rising higher and higher on tiptoe in her impatience to hear the news, and making a corkscrew of her apron and a bottle of her mouth. At last, arriving at a climax of suspense, and seeing the doctor still engaged in the perusal of the letter, she came down flat upon the soles of her feet again, and cast her apron as a veil over her head in a mute despair and inability to bear it any longer.

"Here! girls!" cried the doctor. "I can't help it: I never could keep a secret in my life. There are not many secrets, indeed, worth being kept in such a—well! never mind that. Alfred's coming home, my dears, directly."

"Directly!" exclaimed Marion.

"What! The story-book is soon forgotten!" said the doctor, pinching her cheek. "I thought the news would dry those tears. Yes. 'Let it be a surprise,' he says here. But I can't let it be a surprise. He must have a welcome."

"Directly!" repeated Marion.

"Why, perhaps not what your impatience calls 'directly,' " returned the doctor, "but pretty soon too. Let us see. Let us see. To-day is Thursday, is it not? Then he promises to be here this day month."

"This day month!" repeated Marion softly.

"A gay day and a holiday for us," said the cheerful voice of her sister Grace, kissing her in congratulation. "Long looked forward to, dearest, and come at last."

She answered with a smile; a mourful smile, but full of sisterly affection. As she looked in her sister's face and listened to the quiet music of her voice, picturing the happiness of this return, her own face glowed with hope and joy.

And with a something else; a something shining more and more through all the rest of its expression; for which I have no name. It was not exultation, triumph, proud enthusiasm They are not so calmly shown. It was not love and gratitude alone, though love and gratitude were part of it. It emanated from no sordid thought, for sordid thoughts do not light up the brow and hover on the lips and move the spirit like a fluttered light until the sympathetic figure trembles. Dr. Jeddler, in spite of his system of philosophy—which he was continually contradicting and denying in practice, but more famous philosophers have done that—could not help having as much interest in the return of his old ward and pupil as if it had been a serious event. So he sat himself down in his easy-chair again, stretched out his slippered feet once more upon the rug, read the letter over and over a great many times, and talked it over more times still.

"Ah! The day was," said the doctor, looking at the fire, "when you and he, Grace, used to trot about arm in arm in his holiday time like a couple of walking dolls. You remember?"

"I remember," she answered with her pleasant laugh, and plying her needle busily.

"This day month, indeed!" mused the doctor. "That hardly seems a twelvemonth ago. And where was my little Marion then?"

"Never far from her sister," said Marion cheerily, "however little. Grace was everything to me, even when she was a young child herself."

"True, puss, true," returned the doctor. "She was a staid little woman, was Grace, and a wise housekeeper, and a busy, quiet, pleasant body, bearing with our humors and anticipating our wishes, and always ready to forget her own, even in those times. I never knew you positive or obstinate, Grace, my darling, even then, on any subject but one."

"I am afraid I have changed sadly for the worse since," laughed Grace, still busy at her work. "What was that one, father?"

"Alfred, of course," said the doctor. "Nothing would serve you but you must be called Alfred's wife; so we called you Alfred's wife; and you liked it better, I believe (odd as it seems now), than being called a duchess, if we could have made you one."

"Indeed?" said Grace placidly.

"Why, don't you remember?" inquired the doctor.

"I think I remember something of it," she returned, "but not much. It's so long ago." And as she sat at work she hummed the burden of an old song which the doctor liked.

"Alfred will find a real wife soon," she said, breaking off; "and that will be a happy time indeed for all of us. My three years' trust is nearly at an end, Marion. It has been a very easy one. I shall tell Alfred when I give you back to him that you have loved him dearly all the time, and that he has never once needed my good services. May I tell him so, love?"

"Tell him, dear Grace," replied Marion, "that there never was a trust so generously, nobly, steadfastly discharged; and that I have loved you all the time dearer and dearer every day; and oh! how dearly now!"

"Nay," said her cheerful sister, returning her embrace, "I can scarcely tell him that; we will leave my deserts to Alfred's imagination. It will be liberal enough, dear Marion; like your own."

With that she resumed the work she had for a moment laid down when her sister spoke so fervently; and with it the old song the doctor liked to hear. And the doctor, still reposing in his easy-chair, with his slippered feet stretched out before him on the rug, listened to the tune and beat time on his knee with Alfred's letter, and looked at his two daughters, and thought that among the many trifles of the trifling world, these trifles were agreeable enough.

Clemency Newcome, in the mean time, having accomplished her mission and lingered in the room until she had made herself a party to the news, descended to the kitchen, where her coadjutor, Mr. Britain, was regaling after supper, surrounded by such a plentiful collection of bright pot-lids, well-scoured saucepans, burnished dinner-covers, gleaming kettles, and other tokens of her industrious habits, arranged upon the walls and shelves, that he sat as in the center of a hall of mirrors. The majority did not give forth very flattering portraits of him, certainly; nor were they by any means unanimous in their reflections: as some made him very long-faced, others very broad-faced, some tolerably well looking, others vastly ill-looking, according to their several manners of reflecting: which were as various in respect of one fact as those of so many kinds of men. But they all agreed that in the midst of them sat, quite at his ease, an individual with a pipe in his mouth and a jug of beer at his elbow who nodded condescendingly to Clemency when she stationed herself at the same table.

"Well, Clemmy," said Britain, "how are you by this time, and what's the news?"

Clemency told him the news, which he received very graciously. A gracious change had come over Benjamin from head to foot. He was much broader, much redder, much more cheerful, and much jollier in all respects. It seemed as if his face had been tied up in a knot before, and was now untwisted and smoothed out.

"There'll be another job for Snitchey & Craggs, I suppose," he observed, puffiing slowly at his pipe. "More witnessing for you and me, perhaps, Clemmy!"

"Lor!" replied his fair companion with her favorite twist of her favorite joints. "I wish it was me, Britain!"

"Wish what was you?"

"A-going to be married," said Clemency.

Benjamin took his pipe out of his mouth and laughed heartily. "Yes! you're a likely subject for that!" he said. "Poor Clem!" Clemency for her part laughed as heatily as he and seemed as much amused by the idea. "Yes," she assented, "I'm a likely subject for that; ain't I?"

"You'll never be married, you know," said Mr. Britain, resuming his pipe.

"Don't you think I ever shall, though?" said Clemency in perfect good faith.

Mr. Britain shook his head. "Not a chance of it!"

"Only think!" said Clemency. "Well! I suppose you mean to, Britain, one of these days; don't you?"

A question so abrupt upon a subject so momentous required consideration. After blowing out a great cloud of smoke and looking at it with his head now on this side and now on that as if it were actually the question, and he were surveying it in various aspects, Mr. Britain replied that he wasn't altogether clear about it, but—ye-es—he though he might come to that at last.

"I wish her joy, whoever she may be!" cried Clemency.

"Oh, she'll have that," said Benjamin, "safe enough."

"But she wouldn't have led quite such a joyful life as she will lead, and wouldn't have had quite such a sociable sort of husband as she will have," said Clemency, spreading herself half over the table and staring retrospectively at the candle, "if it hadn't been for—not that I went to do it, for it was accidental, I am sure—if it hadn't been for me; now would she, Britain?"

"Certainly not," returned Mr. Britain, by this time in that high state of appreciation of his pipe when a man can open his mouth but a very little way for speaking purposes; and sitting luxuriously immovable in his chair, can afford to turn only his eyes toward a companion, and that very passively and gravely. "Oh! I'm greatly beholden to you, you know, Clem."

"Lor, how nice that is to think of!" said Clemency.

At the same time, bringing her thoughts as well as her sight to bear upon the candle-grease, and becoming abruptly reminiscent of its healing qualities as a balsam, she anointed her left elbow with a pletiful application of that remedy.

"You see, I've made a good many investigations of one sort and another in my time," pursued Mr. Britain with the profundity of a sage, "having been always of an inquiring turn of mind; and I've read a good many books about the general rights and wrongs of things, for I went into the literary line myself when I began life."

"Did you, though?" cried the admiring Clemency

"Yes," said Mr. Britain: "I was hid for the best part of two years behind a bookstall, ready to fly out if anybody pocketed a volume; and after that I was light porter to a stay and mantua maker, in which capacity I was employed to carry about in oilskin baskets nothing but deceptions—which soured my spirits and disturbed my confidence in human nature; and after that I heard a world of discussions in this house which soured my spirits afresh; and my opinion after all is, that as a safe and comfortable sweetener of the same, and as a pleasant guide through life, there's nothing like a nutmeg-grater."

Clemency was about to offer a suggestion, but he stopped her by anticipating it.

"Combined," he added gravelv, "with a thimble."

"Do as you would, you know, and cetrer, eh?" observed Clemency, folding her arms comfortably in her delight at this avowal and patting her elbows. "Such a short cut, ain't it?"

"I'm not sure," said Mr. Britain, "that it's what would be considered good philosophy. I've my doubts about that; but it wears well and saves a quantity of snarling, which the genuine article don't always."

"See how you used to go on once yourself, you know!" said Clemency.

"Ah!" said Mr. Britain. "But the most extraordinary thing, Clemmy, is that I should live to be brought round through you. That's the strange part of it. Through you! Why, I suppose you haven't so much as half an idea in your head."

Clemency, without taking the least offense, shook it, and laughed and hugged herself, and said, "No, she didn't suppose she had."

"I'm pretty sure of it," said Mr. Britain.

"Oh! I dare say you're right," said Clemency. "I don't pretend to none. I don't want any."

Benjamin took his pipe from his lips and laughed till the tears ran down his face. "What a natural you are, Clemmy!" he said, shaking his head with an infinite relish of the joke and wiping his eyes. Clemency, without the smallest inclination to dispute it, did the like and laughed as heartily as he.

"I can't help liking you," said Mr. Britain; "you're a regular good creature in your way, so shake hands, Clem. Whatever happens, I'll always take notice of you and be a friend to you."

"Will you?" returned Clemency. "Well! that's very good of you."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Britain, giving her his pipe to knock the ashes out of it; "I'll stand by you. Hark! That's a curious noise!"

"Noise!" repeated Clemency.

"A footstep outside. Somebody dropping from the wall, it sounded like," said Britain. "Are they all abed upstairs?"

"Yes, all abed by this time," she replied.

"Didn't you hear anything?"

"No."

They both listened, but heard nothing.

"I tell you what," said Benjamin, taking down a lantern, "I'll have a look around before I go to bed myself, for satisfaction's sake. Undo the door while I light this, Clemmy."

Clemency complied briskly, but observed as she did so that he would only have his walk for his pains, that it was all his fancy, and so forth. Mr. Britain said "very likely;" but sallied out, nevertheless, armed with the poker, and casting the light of the lantern far and near in all directions.

"It's as quiet as a churchyard," said Clemency, looking after him; "and almost as ghostly too!"

Glancing back into the kitchen, she cried fearfully as a light figure stole into her view, "What's that!"

"Hush!" said Marion in an agitated whisper. "You have always loved me, have you not?"

"Loved you, child! You may be sure I have."

"I am sure. And I may trust you, may I not? There is no one else just now whom I can trust."

"Yes," said Clemency with all her heart.

"There is some one out there," pointing to the door, "whom I must see and speak with to-night. Michael Warden, for God's sake, retire! Not now!"

Clemency started with surprise and trouble as, following the direction of the speaker's eyes, she saw a dark figure standing in the doorway.

"In another moment you may be discovered," said Marion. "Not now! Wait, if you can, in some concealment. I will come presently."

He waved his hand to her and was gone.

"Don't go to bed. Wait here for me!" said Marion hurriedly. "I have been seeking to speak to you for an hour past. Oh, be true to me!"

Eagerly seizing her bewildered hand and pressing it with both her own to her breast—an action more expressive in its passion of entreaty than the most eloquent appeal in words—Marion withdrew as the light of the returning lantern flashed into the room.

"All still and peaceable. Nobody there. Fancy, I suppose," said Mr. Britain as he locked and barred the door. "One of the effects of having a lively imagination. Halloo! Why, what's the matter?"

Clemency, who could not conceal the effects of her surprise and concern, was sitting in a chair, pale and trembling from head to foor.

"Matter!" she repeated, chafing her hands and elbows nervously and looking anywhere but at him. "That's good in you, Britain, that is! After going and frightening one out of one's life with noises and lanterns and I don't know what all. Matter! Oh, yes!"

"If you're frightened out of your life by a lantern, Clemmy," said Mr. Britain, composedly blowing it out and hanging it up again, "that apparition's very soon got rid of. But you're as bold as brass in general," he said, stopping to observe her; "and were, after the noise and the lantern too. What have you taken into your head? Not an idea, eh?"

But as Clemency bade him good-night very much after her usual fashion and began to bustle about with a show of going to bed herself immediately, Little Britain, after giving utterance to the original remark that it was impossible to account for a woman's whims, bade her good-night in return, and taking up his candle strolled drowsily away to bed.

When all was quiet Marion returned.

"Open the door," she said, "and stand there close beside me while I speak to him outside."

Timid as her manner was, it still evinced a resolute and settled purpose, such as Clemency could not resist. She softly unbarred the door; but before turning the key, looked round on the young creature waiting to issue forth when she should open it.

The face was not averted or cast down, but looking full upon her in its pride of youth and beauty. Some simple sense of the slightness of the barrier that interposed itself between the happy home and honored love of the fair girl, and what might be the desolation of that home and shipwreck of its dearest treasure, smote so keenly on the tender heart of Clemency, and so filled it to overflowing with sorrow and compassion that, bursting into tears, she threw her arms round Marion's neck.

"It's little that I know, my dear," cried Clemency, "very little; but I know that this should not be. Think of what you do!"

"I have thought of it many times," said Marion gently.

"Once more," urged Clemency. "Till to-morrow." Marion shook her head.

"For Mr. Alfred's sake," said Clemency with homely earnestness. "Him that you used to love so dearly once!"

She hid her face upon the instant in her hands, repeating "Once!" as if it rent her heart.

"Let me go out," said Clemency, soothing her. "I'll tell him what you like. Don't cross the door-step tonight. I'm sure no good will come of it. Oh, it was an unhappy day when Mr. Warden was ever brought here! Think of your good father, darling—of your sister."

"I have," said Marion, hastily raising her head. "You don't know what I do. I must speak to him. You are the best and truest friend in all the world for what you have said to me, but I must take this step. Will you go with me, Clemency," she kissed her on her friendly face, "or shall I go alone?"

Sorrowing and wondering, Clemency turned the key and opened the door. Into the dark and doubtful night that lay beyond the threshold Marion passed quickly, holding by her hand.

In the dark night he joined her, and they spoke together earnestly and long; and the hand that held so fast by Clemency's now trembled, now turned deadly cold, now clasped and closed on hers in the strong feeling of the speech it emphasized unconsciously. When they returned he followed to the door, and pausing there a moment seized the other hand and pressed it to his lips. Then stealthily withdrew.

The door was barred and locked again, and once again she stood beneath her father's roof. Not bowed down by the secret that she brought there, though so young; but with that same expression on her face for which I had no name before, and shining through her tears.

Again she thanked and thanked her humble friend, and trusted to her as she said with confidence implicitly. Her chamber safely reached she fell upon her knees; and with her secret weighing on her heart, could pray!

Could rise up from her prayers so tranquil and serene, and bending over her fond sister in her slumber look upon her face and smile—though sadly: murmuring as she kissed her forehead, how that Grace had been a mother to her ever, and she loved her as a child!

Could draw the passive arm about her neck when lying down to rest—it seemed to cling there of its own will, protectingly and tenderly even in sleep—and breathe upon the parted lips, God bless her!

Could sink into a peaceful sleep herself; but for one dream, in which she cried out in her innocent and touching voice that she was quite alone and they had all forgotten her.

A month soon passes, even at its tardiest pace. The month appointed to elapse between that night and the return was quick of foot and went by like a vapor.

The day arrived. A raging winter day, that shook the old house sometimes as if it shivered in the blast. A day to make home doubly home. To give the chimney-corner new delights. To shed a ruddier glow upon the faces gathered round the hearth, and draw each fireside group into a closer and more social league against the roaring elements without. Such a wild winter day as best prepares the way for shut-out night; for curtained rooms and cheerful looks; for music, laughter, dancing, light, and jovial entertainment!

All these the doctor had in store to welcome Alfred back. They knew that he could not arrive till night; and they would make the night air ring, he said, as he approached. All his old friends should congregate about him. He should not miss a face that he had known and liked. No! They should every one be there!

So guests were bidden, and musicians were engaged, and tables spread, and floors prepared for active feet, and bountiful provision made of every hospitable kind. Because it was the Christmas season, and his eyes were all unused to English holly and its sturdy green, the dancing-room was garlanded and hung with it; and the red berries gleamed an English welcome to him, peeping from among the leaves.

It was a busy day for all of them: a busier day for none of them than Grace, who noiselessly presided everywhere and was the cheerful mind of all the preparations. Many a time that day (as well as many a time within the fleeting month preceding it) did Clemency glance anxiously and almost fearfully at Marion. She saw her paler, perhaps, than usual; but there was a sweet composure on her face that made it lovelier than ever.

At night when she was dressed, and wore upon her head a wreath that Grace had proudly twined about it—its mimic flowers were Alfred's favorites, as Grace remembered when she chose them--that old expression, pensive, almost sorrowful, and yet so spiritual, high, and stirring, sat again upon her brow enhanced a hundredfold.

"The next wreath I adjust on this fair head will be a marriage wreath," said Grace, "or I am no true prophet, dear."

Her sister smiled and held her in her arms.

"A moment, Grace. Don't leave me yet. Are you sure that I want nothing more?"

Her care was not for that. It was her sister's face she thought of, and her eyes were fixed upon it tenderly.

"My art," said Grace, "can go no further, dear girl; nor your beauty. I never saw you look so beautiful as now."

"I never was so happy," she returned.

"Ay, but there is a greater happiness in store. In such another home as cheerful and as bright as this looks now," said Grace, "Alfred and his young wife will soon be living."

She smiled again. "It is a happy home, Grace, in your fancy. I can see it in your eyes. I know it will be happy, dear. How glad I am to know it."

"Well," cried the doctor, bustling in, "here we are, all ready for Alfred, eh? He can't be here until pretty late—an hour or so before midnight—so there'll be plenty of time for making merry before he comes. He'll not find us with the ice unbroken. Pile up the fire here, Britain! Let it shine upon the holly till it winks again. It's a world of nonsense, puss; true lovers and all the rest of it—all nonsense; but we'll be nonsensical with the rest of 'em, and give our true lover a mad welcome. Upon my word!" said the old doctor, looking at his daughters proudly, "I'm not clear to-night, among other absurdities, but that I'm the father of two handsome girls."

"All that one of them has ever done or may do—may do, dearest father—to cause you pain or grief, forgive her," said Marion, "forgive her now, when her heart is full. Say that you forgive her. That you will forgive her. That she shall always share your love, and——" And the rest was not said, for her face was hidden on the old man's shoulder.

"Tut, tut, tut," said the doctor gently. "Forgive!

What have I to forgive? Heyday, if our true lovers come back to flurry us like this we must hold 'em at a distance; we must send expresses out to stop 'em short upon the road, and bring 'em on a mile or two a day until we're properly prepared to meet 'em. Kiss me, puss. Forgive! Why, what a silly child you are. If you had vexed and crossed me fifty times a day instead of not at all I'd forgive you everything but such a supplication. Kiss me again, puss. There! Prospective and retrospective—a clear score between us. Pile up the fire there! Would you freeze the people on this bleak December night? Let us be light, and warm, and merry, or I'll not forgive some of you!"

So gayly the old doctor carried it! And the fire was piled up, and the lights were bright, and company arrived, and a murmuring of lively tongues began, and already there was a pleasant air of cheerful excitement stirring through all the house.

More and more company came flocking in. Bright eyes sparkled upon Marion; smiling lips gave her joy of his return; sage mothers fanned themselves and hoped she mightn't be too youthful and inconstant for the quiet round of home; impetuous fathers fell into disgrace for too much exaltation of her beauty; daughters envied her; sons envied him; innumerable pairs of lovers profited by the occasion; all were interested, animated, and expectant.

Mr. and Mrs. Craggs came arm in arm, but Mrs. Snitchey came alone.

"Why, what's become of him?" inquired the doctor.

The feather of a bird of paradise in Mrs. Snitchey's turban trembled as if the bird of paradise were alive again when she said that doubtless Mr. Craggs knew. She was never told.

"That nasty office," said Mrs. Craggs.

"I wish it would burn down," said Mrs. Snitchey.

"He's—he's—there's a little matter of business that keeps my partner rather late," said Mr. Craggs, looking uneasily about him.

"Oh—h! Business. Don't tell me!" said Mrs. Snitchey.

"We know what business means," said Mrs. Craggs.

But their not knowing what it meant was perhaps the reason why Mrs. Snitchey's bird of paradise feather quivered so portentously, and why all the pendent bits on Mrs. Craggs' ear-rings shook like little bells.

"I wonder you could come away, Mr. Craggs," said his wife.

"Mr. Craggs is fortunate, I'm sure!" said Mrs. Snitchey.

"That office so engrosses 'em," said Mrs. Craggs.

"A person with an office has no business to be married at all," said Mrs. Snitchey.

Then Mrs. Snitchey said within herself that that look of hers had pierced to Craggs' soul, and he knew it; and Mrs. Craggs observed to Craggs that "his Snitcheys" were deceiving him behind his back, and he would find it out when it was too late.

Still, Mr. Craggs, without much heeding these remarks, looked uneasily about until his eye rested on Grace, to whom he immediately presented himself.

"Good-evening, ma'am," remarked Craggs. "You look charmingly. Your—Miss—your sister, Miss Marion, is she——"

"Oh, she's quite well, Mr. Craggs."

"Yes—I—is she here?" asked Craggs.

"Here! Don't you see her yonder? Going to dance?" said Grace.

Mr. Craggs put on his spectacles to see the better; looked at her through them for some time; coughed; and put them with an air of satisfaction in their sheath again and in his pocket.

Now the music struck up and the dance commenced. The bright fire crackled and sparkled, rose and fell as though it joined the dance itself, in right good fellowship. Sometimes it roared as if it would make music too. Sometimes it flashed and beamed as if it were the eye of the old room: it winked too, sometimes, like a knowing patriarch, upon the youthful whisperers in corners. Sometimes it sported with the holly-boughs; and shining on the leaves by fits and starts, made them look as if they were in the cold winter night again and fluttering in the wind. Sometimes its genial humor grew obstreperous and passed all bounds; and then it cast into the room and among the twinkling feet with a loud burst a shower of harmless little sparks, and in its exultation leaped and bounded like a mad thing up the broad cold chimney.

Another dance was near its close when Mr. Snitchey touched his partner, who was looking on, upon the arm.

Mr. Craggs started as if his familiar had been a specter.

"Is he gone?" he asked.

"Hush! He has been with me," said Snitchey, "for three hours and more. He went over everything. He looked into all our arrangements for him and was very particular indeed. He—humph!"

The dance was finished. Marion passed close before him as he spoke. She did not observe him or his partner, but looked over her shoulder toward her sister in the distance as she slowly made her way into the crowd and passed out of their view.

"You see! All safe and well," said Mr. Craggs. "He didn't recur to that subject, I suppose?"

"Not a word."

"And is he really gone? Is he safe away?"

"He keeps to his word. He drops down the river with the tide in that shell of a boat of his, and so goes out to sea on this dark night—a daredevil he is—before the wind. There's no such lonely road anywhere else. That's one thing. The tide flows, he says, an hour before midnight—about this time. I'm glad it's over." Mr. Snitchey wiped his forehead, which looked hot and anxious.

"What do you think," said Mr. Craggs, "about——"

"Hush!" replied his cautious partner, looking straight before him. "I understand you. Don't mention names, and don't let us seem to be talking secrets. I don't know what to think; and to tell you the truth, I don't care now. It's a great relief. His self-love deceived him, I suppose. Perhaps the young lady coquetted a little. The evidence would seem to point that way. Alfred not arrived?"

"Not yet," said Mr. Craggs. "Expected every minute."

"Good." Mr. Snitchey wiped his forehead again. "It's a great relief. I haven't been so nervous since we've been in partnership. I intend to spend the evening now, Mr. Craggs."

Mrs. Craggs and Mrs. Snitchey joined them as he announced this intention. The bird of paradise was in a state of extreme vibration, and the little bells were ringing quite audibly.

"It has been the theme of general comment, Mr.

Snitchey," said Mrs. Snitchey. "I hope the office is satisfied."

"Satisfied with what, my dear?" asked Mr. Snitchey.

"With the exposure of a defenseless woman to ridicule and remark," returned his wife. "That is quite in the way of the office, that is."

"I really, myself," said Mrs. Craggs, "have been so long accustomed to connect the office with everything opposed to domesticity that I am glad to know it as the avowed enemy of my peace. There is something honest in that, at all events."

"My dear," urged Mr. Craggs, "your good opinion is invaluable, but I never avowed that the office was the enemy of your peace."

"No," said Mrs. Craggs, ringing a perfect peal upon the little bells. "Not you, indeed. You wouldn't be worthy of the office if you had the candor to."

"As to my having been away to-night, my dear," said Mr. Snitchey, giving her his arm, "the deprivation has been mine, I'm sure; but as Mr. Craggs knows——"

Mrs. Snitchey cut this reference very short by hitching her husband to a distance and asking him to look at that man. To do her the favor to look at him.

"At which man, my dear?" said Mr. Snitchey.

"Your chosen companion; I'm no companion to you, Mr. Snitchey."

"Yes, yes, you are, my dear," he interposed.

"No, no, I'm not," said Mrs. Snitchey with a majestic smile. "I know my station. Will you look at your chosen companion, Mr. Snitchey, at your referee, at the keeper of your secrets, at the man you trust, at your other self, in short?"

The habitual association of self with Craggs occasioned Mr. Snitchey to look in that direction.

"If you can look that man in the eye this night," said Mrs. Snitchey, "and not know that you are deluded, practiced upon, made the victim of his arts, and bent down prostrate to his will by some unaccountable fascination which it is impossible to explain and against which no warning of mine is of the least avail, all I can say is—I pity you!"

At the very same moment Mrs. Craggs was oracular on the cross subject. Was it possible, she said, that Craggs could so blind himself to his Snitchey as not to feel his true position? Did he mean to say that he had seen his Snitchey come into that room, and didn't plainly see that there was reservation, cunning, treachery in the man? Would he tell her that his very action, when he wiped his forehead and looked so stealthily about him, didn't show that there was something weighing on the conscience of his precious Snitchey (if he had a conscience) that wouldn't bear the light? Did anybody but his Snitchey come to festive entertainments like a burglar?—which, by the way, was hardly a clear illustration of the case, as he had walked in very mildly at the door. And would he still assert to her at noonday (it being nearly midnight) that his Snitchey was to be justified through thick and thin, against all facts and reason and experience?

Neither Snitchey nor Craggs openly attempted to stem the current which had thus set in, but both were content to be carried gently along it until its force abated. This happened at about the same time as a general movement for a country dance; when Mr. Snitchey proposed himself as a partner to Mrs. Craggs, and Mr. Craggs gallantly offered himself to Mrs. Snitchey; and after some such slight evasions as "Why don't you ask somebody else?" and "You'll be glad, I know, if I decline," and "I wonder you can dance out of the office" (but this jocosely now), each lady graciously accepted and took her place.

It was an old custom among them, indeed, to do so, and to pair off in like manner at dinners and suppers; for they were excellent friends and on a footing of easy familiarity. Perhaps the false Craggs and the wicked Snitchey were a recognized fiction with the two wives, as Doe and Roe, incessantly running up and down bailiwicks, were with the two husbands: or perhaps the ladies had instituted and taken upon themselves these two shares in the business, rather than be left out of it altogether. But certain it is that each wife went as gravely and steadily to work in her vocation as her husband did in his, and would have considered it almost impossible for the firm to maintain a successful and respectable existence without her laudable exertions.

But now the bird of paradise was seen to flutter down the middle; and the little bells began to bounce and jingle in poussette; and the doctor's rosy face spun round and round like an expressive peg-top highly varnished; and breathless Mr. Craggs began to doubt already whether country dancing had been made "too easy," like the rest of life; and Mr. Snitchey, with his nimble cuts and capers, footed it for self and Craggs and half a dozen more.

Now, too, the fire took fresh courage, favored by the lively wind the dance awakened, and burned clear and high. It was the genius of the room and present everywhere. It shone in people's eyes, it sparkled in the jewels on the snowy necks of girls, it twinkled at their ears as if it whispered to them slyly, it flashed about their waists, it flickered on the ground and made it rosy for their feet, it bloomed upon the ceiling that its glow might set off their bright faces, and it kindled up a general illumination in Mrs. Craggs' little belfry.

Now, too, the lively air that fanned it grew less gentle as the music quickened and the dance proceeded with new spirit; and a breeze arose that made the leaves and berries dance upon the wall as they had often done upon the trees; and the breeze rustled in the room as if an invisible company of fairies, treading in the footsteps of the good substantial revelers, were whirling after them. Now, too, no feature of the doctor's face could be distinguished as he spun and spun; and now there seemed a dozen birds of paradise in fitful flight; and now there were a thousand little bells at work; and now a fleet of flying skirts was ruffled by a little tempest, when the music gave in and the dance was over.

Hot and breathless as the doctor was, it only made him the more impatient for Alfred's coming.

"Anything been seen, Britain? Anything been heard?"

"Too dark to see far, sir. Too much noise inside the house to hear."

"That's right! The gayer welcome for him. How goes the time?"

"Just twelve, sir. He can't be long, sir."

"Stir up the fire and throw another log upon it," said the doctor. "Let him see his welcome blazing out upon the night—good boy!—as he comes along!"

He saw it—yes! From the chaise he caught the light as he turned the corner by the old church. He knew the room from which it shone. He saw the wintry branches of the old trees between the light and him. He knew that one of those trees rustled musically in the summer-time at the window of Marion's chamber.

The tears were in his eyes. His heart throbbed so violently that he could hardly bear his happiness. How often he had thought of this time—pictured it under all circumstances—feared that it might never come—yearned and wearied for it—far away!

Again the light! Distinct and ruddy; kindled, he knew, to give him welcome and to speed him home. He beckoned with his hand, and waved his hat, and cheered out loud as if the light were they and they could see and hear him as he dashed toward them through the mud and mire triumphantly.

Stop! He knew the doctor and understood what he had done. He would not let it be a surprise to them. But he could make it one yet by going forward on foot. If the orchard gate were open he would enter there; if not, the wall was easily climbed, as he knew of old; and he would be among them in an instant.

He dismounted from the chaise, and telling the driver —even that was not easy in his agitation—to remain behind for a few minutes and then to follow slowly, ran on with exceeding swiftness, tried the gate, scaled the wall, jumped down on the other side, and stood panting in the old orchard.

There was a frosty rime upon the trees, which, in the faint light of the clouded moon, hung upon the smaller branches like dead garlands. Withered leaves crackled and snapped beneath his feet as he crept softly on toward the house. The desolation of a winter night sat brooding on the earth and in the sky. But the red light came cheerily toward him from the windows; figures passed and repassed there; and the hum and murmur of voices greeted his ear sweetly.

Listening for hers, attempting, as he crept on, to detach it from the rest, and half-believing that he heard it, he had nearly reached the door, when it was abruptly opened and a figure coming out encountered his. It instantly recoiled with a half-suppressed cry.

"Clemency," he said, "don't you know me?"

"Don't come in!" she answered, pushing him back. "Go away. Don't ask me why. Don't come in."

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed.

"I don't know. I—I am afraid to think. Go back. Hark!"

There was a sudden tumult in the house. She put her hands upon her ears. A wild scream, such as no hands could shut out, was heard; and Grace—distraction in her looks and manner—rushed out at the door.

"Grace!" He caught her in his arms. "What is it? Is she dead?"

She disengaged herself as if to recognize his face, and fell down at his feet.

A crowd of figures came about them from the house. Among them was her father with a paper in his hand.

"What is it?" cried Alfred, grasping his hair with his hands and looking in an agony from face to face as he bent upon his knee beside the insensible girl. "Will no one look at me? Will no one speak to me? Does no one know me? Is there no voice among you all to tell me what it is?"

There was a murmur among them. "She is gone."

"Gone!" he echoed.

"Fled, my dear Alfred!" said the doctor in a broken voice and with his hands before his face. "Gone from her home and us. To-night! She writes that she has made her innocent and blameless choice—entreats that we will forgive her—prays that we will not forget her—and is gone."

"With whom? Where?"

He started up as if to follow in pursuit; but when they gave way to let him pass, looked wildly round upon them, staggered back, and sank down in his former attitude, clasping one of Grace's cold hands in his own.

There was a hurried running to and fro, confusion, noise, disorder, and no purpose. Some proceeded to disperse themselves about the roads, and some took horse, and some got lights, and some conversed together, urging that there was no trace or track to follow. Some approached him kindly, with the view of offering consolation; some admonished him that Grace must be removed into the house, and that he prevented it. He never heard them and he never moved.

The snow fell fast and thick. He looked up for a moment in the air and thought that those white ashes strewn upon his hopes and misery were suited to them well. He looked round on the whitening ground and thought how Marion's footprints would be hushed and covered up as soon as made, and even that remembrance of her blotted out. But he never felt the weather and he never stirred.

PART THE THIRD.

THE world had grown six years older since that night of the return. It was a warm autumn afternoon, and there had been heavy rain. The sun burst suddenly from among the clouds; and the old battle-ground, sparkling brilliantly and cheerfully at sight of it in one green place, flashed a responsive welcome there, which spread along the country side as if a joyful beacon had been lighted up and answered from a thousand stations.

How beautiful the landscape kindling in the light and that luxuriant influence passing on like a celestial presence, brightening everything! The wood, a somber mass before, revealed its varied tints of yellow, green, brown, red: its different forms of trees, with raindrops glittering on their leaves and twinkling as they fell. The verdant meadow-land, bright and glowing, seemed as if it had been blind a minute since, and now had found a sense of sight wherewith to look up at the shining sky. Cornfields, hedgerows, fences, homesteads, and clustered roofs, the steeple of the church, the stream, the water-mill, all sprang out of the gloomy darkness smiling. Birds sang sweetly, flowers raised their drooping heads, fresh scents arose from the invigorated ground; the blue expanse above extended and diffused itself; already the sun's slanting rays pierced mortally the sullen bank of cloud that lingered in its flight; and a rainbow, spirit of all the colors that adorned the earth and sky, spanned the whole arch with its triumphant glory.

At such a time, one little roadside inn, snugly sheltered behind a great elm tree with a rare seat for idlers encircling its capacious bole, addressed a cheerful front toward the traveler, as a house of entertainment ought, and tempted him with many mute but significant assurances of a comfortable welcome. The ruddy sign-board perched up in a tree, with its golden letters winking in the sun, ogled the passer-by from among the green leaves like a jolly face and promised good cheer. The horse-trough, full of clear fresh water, and the ground below it sprinkled with droppings of fragrant hay, made every horse that passed prick up his ears. The crimson curtains in the lower rooms and the pure white hangings in the little bedchambers above beckoned, Come in! with every breath of air. Upon the bright green shutters there were golden legends about beer and ale, and neat wines, and good beds; and an affecting picture of a brown jug frothing over at the top. Upon the window-sills were flowering plants in bright red pots, which made a lively show against the white front of the house; and in the darkness of the doorway there were streaks of light, which glanced off from the surface of bottles and tankards.

On the door-step appeared a proper figure of a landlord, too; for though he was a short man he was round and broad, and stood with his hands in his pockets and his legs just wide enough apart to express a mind at rest upon the subject of the cellar and an easy confidence—too calm and virtuous to become a swaggerer—in the general resources of the inn. The superabundant moisture trickling from everything after the late rain set him off well. Nothing near him was thirsty. Certain top-heavy dahlias, looking over the palings of his neat, well-ordered garden, had swilled as much as they could carry—perhaps a trifle more—and may have been the worse for liquor; but the sweet-briar, roses, wall-flowers, the plants at the windows, and the leaves on the old tree were in the beaming state of moderate company that had taken no more than was wholesome for them and had served to develop their best qualities. Sparkling dewy drops about them on the ground, they seemed profuse of innocent and sparkling mirth that did good where it lighted, softening neglected corners which the steady rain could seldom reach, and hurting nothing.

This village inn had assumed, on being established, an uncommon sign. It was called the Nutmeg-Grater. And underneath that household word was inscribed up in the tree, on the same flaming board and in the same like golden characters, by Benjamin Britain.

At a second glance and on a more minute examination of his face you might have known that it was no other than Benjamin Britain himself who stood in the doorway—reasonably changed by time, but for the better; a very comfortable host indeed.

"Mrs. B.," said Mr. Britain, looking down the road, "is rather late. It's tea-time."

As there was no Mrs. Britain coming, he strolled leisurely out into the road and looked up at the house, very much to his satisfaction. "It's just the sort of a house," said Benjamin, "I should wish to stop at if I didn't keep it."

Then he strolled toward the garden paling and took a look at the dahlias. They looked over at him with a helpless drowsy hanging of their heads, which bobbed again as the heavy drops of wet dripped off them.

"You must be looked after," said Benjamin. "Memorandum, not to forget to tell her so. She's a long time coming!"

Mr. Britain's better half seemed to be by so very much his better half that his own moiety of himself was utterly cast away and helpless without her.

"She hadn't much to do, I think," said Ben. "There were a few little matters of business after market, but not many. Oh! here we are at last!"

A chaise-cart driven by a boy came clattering along the road, and seated in it in a chair, with a large, well-saturated umbrella spread out to dry behind her, was the plump figure of a matronly woman, with her bare arms folded across a basket which she carried on her knee, several other baskets and parcels lying crowded around her, and a certain bright good nature in her face and contented awkwardness in her manner as she jogged to and fro with the motion of her carriage, which smacked of old times, even in the distance. Upon her nearer approach this relict of by-gone days was not diminished; and when the cart stopped at the Nutmeg-Grater door a pair of shoes, alighting from it, slipped nimbly through Mr. Britain's open arms, and came down with a substantial weight upon the pathway, which shoes could hardly have belonged to any one but Clemency Newcome.

In fact they did belong to her, and she stood in them, and a rosy, comfortable-looking soul she was: with as much soap on her glossy face as in times of yore, but with whole elbows now that had grown quite dimpled in her improved condition.

"You're late, Clemmy!" said Mr. Britain.

"Why, you see, Ben, I've had a deal to do!" she replied, looking busily after the safe removal into the house of all the packages and baskets: "eight, nine, ten—where's eleven? Oh! my basket's eleven! It's all right. Put the horse up, Harry, and if he coughs again give him a warm mash to-night. Eight, nine, ten. Why, where's eleven? Oh, I forgot—it's all right. How's the children, Ben?"

"Hearty, Clemmy, hearty."

"Bless their precious faces!" said Mrs. Britain, unbonneting her own round countenance (for she and her husband were by this time in the bar) and smoothing her hair with her open hands. "Give us a kiss, old man!"

Mr. Britain promptly complied.

"I think," said Mrs. Britain, applying herself to her pockets and drawing forth an immense bulk of thin books and crumpled papers, a very kennel of dog's-ears, "I've done everything. Bills all settled—turnips sold—brewer's account looked into and paid—'bacco pipes ordered—seventeen pound four paid into the bank—Dr. Heathfield's charge for little Clem—you'll see what that is—Dr. Heathfield won't take nothing again, Ben."

"I thought he wouldn't," returned Britain.

"No. He says whatever family you was to have, Ben, he'd never put you to the cost of a halfpenny. Not if you was to have twenty."

Mr. Britain's face assumed a serious expression, and he looked hard at the wall.

"Ain't it kind of him?" said Clemency.

"Very," returned Mr. Britain. "It's the sort of kindness that I wouldn't presume upon on any account."

"No," retorted Clemency. "Of course not. Then there's the pony—he fetched eight pound two; and that ain't bad, is it?"

"It's very good," said Ben.

"I'm glad you're pleased!" exclaimed his wife "I thought you would be; and I think that's all, and so no more at present from yours and cetrer, C. Britain. Ha! ha! ha! There! Take all the papers and lock 'em up. Oh! Wait a minute. Here's a printed bill to stick on the wall. Wet from the printer's. How nice it smells!"

"What's this?" said Ben, looking over the document.

"I don't know," replied his wife. "I haven't read a word of it."

"'To be sold by auction,'" read the host of the Nutmeg-Grater, "'unless previously disposed of by private contract.'"

"They always put that," said Clemency.

"Yes, but they don't always put this," he returned. "Look here, 'Mansion,' etc., 'offices,' etc., 'shrubberies,' etc., 'ring fence,' etc., 'Messrs. Snitchey & Craggs,' etc., 'ornamental portion of the unincumbered freehold property of Michael Warden, Esquire, intending to continue to reside abroad!'"

"Intending to continue to reside abroad!" repeated Clemency.

"Here it is," said Britain. "Look!"

"And it was only this very day that I heard it whispered at the old house that better and plainer news had been half-promised of her soon!" said Clemency, shaking her head sorrowfully and patting her elbows as if the recollection of old times unconsciously awakened her old habits. "Dear! dear! dear! There'll be heavy hearts, Ben, yonder."

Mr. Britain heaved a sigh and shook his head, and said he couldn't make it out; he had left off trying long ago. With that remark he applied himself to putting up the bill just inside the bar window. Clemency, after meditating in silence for a few moments, roused herself, cleared her thoughtful brow, and bustled off to look after the children.

Though the host of the Nutmeg-Grater had a lively regard for his good wife, it was of the old patronizing kind, and she amused him mightily. Nothing would have astonished him so much as to have known for certain from any third party that it was she who managed the whole house and made him, by her plain, straightforward thrift, good-humor, honesty, and industry, a thriving man. So easy it is in any degree of life (as the world very often finds it) to take those cheerful natures that ever assert their merit at their own modest valuation, and to conceive a flippant liking of people for their outward oddities and eccentricities, whose innate worth, if we would look so far, might make us blush in the comparison!

It was comfortable to Mr. Britain to think of his own condescension in having married Clemency. She was a perpetual testimony to him of the goodness of his heart and the kindness of his disposition, and he felt that her being an excellent wife was an illustration of the old precept that virtue is its own reward.

He had finished wafering up the bill and had locked the vouchers for her day's proceedings in the cupboard—chuckling all the time over her capacity for business—when, returning with the news that the two Master Britains were playing in the coach-house under the superintendence of one Betsy, and that little Clem was sleeping "like a picture," she sat down to tea, which had awaited her arrival on a little table. It was a very neat little bar, with the usual display of bottles and glasses; a sedate clock, right to the minute (it was half-past five); everything in its place, and everything furbished and polished up to the very utmost.

"It's the first time I've sat down quietly to-day, I declare," said Mrs. Britain, taking a long breath as if she had sat down for the night; but getting up again immediately to hand her husband his tea and cut him his bread-and-butter; "how that bill does set me thinking of old times!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Britain, handling his saucer like an oyster and disposing of its contents on the same principle.

"That same Mr. Michael Warden," said Clemency, shaking her head at the notice of sale, "lost me my old place."

"And got you your husband," said Mr. Britain.

"Well! So he did," returned Clemency, "and many thanks to him."

"Man's the creature of habit," said Mr. Britain, surveying her over his saucer. "I had somehow got used to you, Clem, and I found I shouldn't be able to get on without you. So we went and got made man and wife. Ha! ha! We! Who'd have thought it!"

"Who indeed!" cried Clemency. "It was very good of you, Ben."

"No, no, no," replied Mr. Britain with an air of self-denial. "Nothing worth mentioning."

"Oh, yes, it was, Ben," said his wife with great simplicity; "I'm sure I think so, and am very much obliged to you. Ah!" looking again at the bill, "when she was known to be gone and out of reach, dear girl, I couldn't help telling—for her sake quite as much as theirs—what I knew, could I?"

"You told it, anyhow," observed her husband.

"And Dr. Jeddler," pursued Clemency, putting down her tea-cup and looking thoughtfully at the bill, "in his grief and passion turned me out of house and home! I never have been so glad of anything in all my life as that I didn't say an angry word to him and hadn't any angry feeling toward him, even then; for he repented that truly afterward. How often he has sat in this room and told me over and over again he was sorry for it—the last time only yesterday, when you were out. How often he has sat in this room and talked to me hour after hour about one thing and another, in which he made believe to be interested—but only for the sake of the days that are gone by and because he knows she used to like me, Ben!"

"Why, how did you ever come to catch a glimpse of that, Clem?" asked her husband, astonished that she should have a distinct perception of a truth which had only dimly suggested itself to his inquiring mind.

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Clemency, blowing her tea to cool it. "Bless you, I couldn't tell you if you was to offer me a reward of a hundred pound."

He might have pursued this metaphysical subject but for her catching a glimpse of a substantial fact behind him in the shape of a gentleman attired in mourning and cloaked and booted like a rider on horseback, who stood at the bar door. He seemed attentive to their conversation and not at all impatient to interrupt.

Clemency hastily rose at this sight. Mr. Britain also rose and saluted the guest. "Will you please to walk upstairs, sir? There's a very nice room upstairs, sir."

"Thank you," said the stranger, looking earnestly at Mr. Britain's wife. "May I come in here?"

"Oh, surely, if you like, sir," returned Clemency, admitting him. "What would you please to want, sir?"

The bill had caught his eye and he was reading it.

"Excellent property that, sir," observed Mr. Britian.

He made no answer; but turning round when he had finished reading looked at Clemency with the same observant curiosity as before. "You were asking me——" he said, still looking at her.

"What you would please to take, sir," answered Clemency, stealing a glance at him in return.

"If you will let me have a draught of ale," he said, moving to a table by the window, "and will let me have it here without being any interruption to your meal, I shall be much obliged to you."

He sat down as he spoke without any further parley and looked out at the prospect. He was an easy, well-knit figure of a man in the prime of life. His face, much browned by the sun, was shaded by a quantity of dark hair; and he wore a mustache. His beer being set before him, he filled out a glass and drank good-humoredly to the house; adding, as he put the tumbler down again:

"It's a new house, is it not?"

"Not particularly new, sir," replied Mr. Britain.

"Between five and six years old," said Clemency, speaking very distinctly.

"I think I heard you mention Dr. Jeddler's name as I came in?" inquired the stranger. "That bill reminds me of him; for I happen to know something of that story by hearsay and through certain connections of mine. Is the old man living?"

"Yes, he's living, sir," said Clemency.

"Much changed?"

"Since when, sir?" returned Clemency with remarkable emphasis and expression.

"Since his daughter—went away."

"Yes! he's greatly changed since then," said Clemency. "He's gray and old, and hasn't the same way with him at all; but I think he's happy now. He has taken on with his sister since then and goes to see her very often. That did him good directly. At first he was sadly broken down; and it was enough to make one's heart bleed to see him wandering about railing at the world; but a great change for the better came over him after a year or two, and then he began to like to talk about his lost daughter and to praise her, ay, and the world too! and was never tired of saying, with the tears in his poor eyes, how beautiful and good she was. He had forgiven her then. That was about the same time as Miss Grace's marriage. Britain, you remember?"

Mr. Britain remembered very well.

"The sister is married, then," returned the stranger. He paused for some time before he asked, "To whom?"

Clemency narrowly escaped oversetting the tea-board in her emotion at this question.

"Did you never hear?" she said.

"I should like to hear," he replied as he filled his glass again and raised it to his lips.

"Ah! It would be a long story if it was properly told," said Clemency, resting her chin on the palm of her left hand and supporting that elbow on her right hand as she shook her head and looked back through the intervening years as if she were looking at a fire. "It would be a long story, I am sure."

"But told as a short one," suggested the stranger.

"Told as a short one," repeated Clemency in the same thoughtful tone and without any apparent reference to him or consciousness of having auditors, "what would there be to tell? That they grieved together and remembered her together like a person dead; that they were so tender of her, never would reproach her, called her back to one another as she used to be, and found excuses for her! Every one knows that. I'm sure I do. No one better," added Clemency, wiping her eyes with her hand.

"And so——" suggested the stranger.

"And so," said Clemency, taking him up mechanically and without any change in her attitude or manner, "they were married on her birthday—it comes round again to-morrow—very quiet, very humble like, but very happy. Mr. Alfred said one night when they were walking in the orchard, 'Grace, shall our wedding-day be Marion's birthday?' And it was."

"And they have lived happily together?" said the stranger.

"Ay," said Clemency. "No two people ever more so. They have had no sorrow but this."

She raised her head as with a sudden attention to the circumstances under which she was recalling these events and looked quickly at the stranger. Seeing that his face was turned toward the window and that he seemed intent upon the prospect, she made some eager signs to her husband and pointed to the bill and moved her mouth as if she were repeating with great energy one word or phrase to him over and over again. As she uttered no sound and as her dumb motions, like most of her gestures, were of a very extraordinary kind, this unintelligible conduct reduced Mr. Britain to the confines of despair. He stared at the table, at the stranger, at the spoons, at his wife—followed her pantomime with looks of deep amazement and perplexity—asked in the same language was it property in danger, was it he in danger, was it she—answered her signals with other signals expressive of the deepest distress and confusion—followed the motions of her lips—guessed half-aloud "milk and water," "monthly warning," "mice and walnuts"—and couldn't approach her meaning.

Clemency gave it up at last as a hopeless attempt; and moving her chair by very slow degrees a little nearer to the stranger, sat with her eyes apparently cast down, but glancing sharply at him now and then, waiting until he should ask some other question. She had not to wait long, for he said presently:

"And what is the after-history of the young lady who went away? They know it, I suppose?"

Clemency shook her head. "I've heard," she said, "that Dr. Jeddler is thought to know more of it than he tells. Miss Grace has had letters from her sister, saying that she was well and happy and made much happier by her being married to Mr. Alfred; and has written letters back. But there's a mystery about her life and fortunes altogether which nothing has cleared up to this hour and which——"

She faltered here and stopped.

"And which——" repeated the stranger.

"Which only one other person, I believe, could explain," said Clemency, drawing her breath quickly.

"Who may that be?" asked the stranger.

"Mr. Michael Warden!" answered Clemency almost in a shriek, at once conveying to her husband what she would have had him understand before and letting Michael Warden know that he was recognized.

"You remember me, sir?" said Clemency, trembling with emotion; "I saw just now you did. You remember me, that night in the garden. I was with her!"

"Yes. You were," he said.

"Yes, sir," returned Clemency. "Yes, to be sure. This is my husband, if you please. Ben, my dear Ben, run to Miss Grace—run to Mr. Alfred—run somewhere, Ben! Bring somebody here directly!"

"Stay!" said Michael Warden, quietly interposing himself between the door and Britain. "What would you do?"

"Let them know that you are here, sir," answered Clemency, clapping her hands in sheer agitation. "Let them know that they may hear of her from your own lips; let them know that she is not quite lost to them, but that she will come home again yet to bless her father and her loving sister—even her old servant, even me," she struck herself upon the breast with both hands, "with a sight of her sweet face. Run, Ben, run!" And still she pressed him on toward the door, and still Mr. Warden stood before it with his hand stretched out, not angrily, but sorrowfully.

"Or perhaps," said Clemency, running past her husband and catching in her emotion at Mr. Warden's cloak, "perhaps she's here now; perhaps she's close by. I think from your manner she is. Let me see her, sir, if you please. I waited on her when she was a little child. I saw her grow to be the pride of all this place. I knew her when she was Mr. Alfred's promised wife. I tried to warn her when you tempted her away. I know what her old home was when she was like the soul of it, and how it changed when she was gone and lost. Let me speak to her, if you please!"

He gazed at her with compassion, not unmixed with wonder, but he made no gesture of assent.

"I don't think she can know," pursued Clemency, "how truly they forgive her; how they love her; what joy it would be to them to see her once more. She may be timorous of going home. Perhaps if she sees me it may give her new heart. Only tell me truly, Mr. Warden, is she with you?"

"She is not," he answered, shaking his head.

This answer, and his manner, and his black dress, and his coming back so quietly, and his announced intention of continuing to live abroad, explained it all. Marion was dead.

He didn't contradict her; yes, she was dead! Clemency sat down, hid her face upon the table, and cried.

At that moment a gray-headed old gentleman came running in quite out of breath, and panting so much that his voice was scarcely to be recognized as the voice of Mr. Snitchey.

"Good Heaven, Mr. Warden!" said the lawyer, taking him aside, "what wind has blown—" He was so blown himself that he couldn't get on any further until after a pause, when he added feebly, "you here?"

"An ill-wind, I am afraid," he answered. "If you could have heard what has just passed—how I have been besought and entreated to perform impossibilities—what confusion and affliction I carry with me!"

"I can guess it all. But why did you ever come here, my good sir?" retorted Snitchey.

"Come! How should I know who kept the house? When I sent my servant on to you I strolled in here because the place was new to me; and I had a natural curiosity in everything new and old in these old scenes; and it was outside the town. I wanted to communicate with you first before appearing there. I wanted to know what people would say to me. I see by your manner that you can tell me. If it were not for your confounded caution I should have been possessed of everything long ago."

"Our caution!" returned the lawyer. "Speaking for self and Craggs—deceased," here Mr. Snitchey, glancing at his hat-band, shook his head, "how can you reasonably blame us, Mr. Warden? It was understood between us that the subject was never to be renewed, and that it wasn't a subject on which grave and sober men like us (I made a note of your observations at the time) could interfere. Our caution too! When Mr. Craggs, sir, went down to his respected grave in the full belief——"

"I had given a solemn promise of silence until I should return, whenever that might be," interrupted Mr. Warden, "and I have kept it."

"Well, sir, and I repeat it," returned Mr. Snitchey, "we were bound to silence too. We were bound to silence in our duty toward ourselves and in our duty toward a variety of clients, you among them, who were as close as wax. It was not our place to make inquiries of you on such a delicate subject. I had my suspicions, sir, but it is not six months since I have known the truth and been assured that you lost her."

"By whom?" inquired his client.

"By Dr. Jeddler himself, sir, who at last reposed that confidence in me voluntarily. He, and only he, who has known the whole truth years and years."

"And you know it?" said his client.

"I do, sir!" replied Snitchey; "and I have also reason to know that it will be broken to her sister to-morrow evening. They have given her that promise. In the mean time, perhaps you'll give me the honor of your company at my house, being unexpected at your own. But, not to run the chance of any more such difficulties as you have had here in case you should be recognized—though you're a good deal changed; I think I might have passed you myself, Mr. Warden—we had better dine here and walk on in the evening. It's a very good place to dine at, Mr. Warden: your own property, by the bye. Self and Craggs (deceased) took a chop here sometimes and had it very comfortably served. Mr. Craggs, sir," said Snitchey, shutting his eyes tight for an instant and opening them again, "was struck off the roll of life too soon."

"Heaven forgive me for not condoling with you," returned Michael Warden, passing his hand across his forehead, "but I'm like a man in a dream at present. I seem to want my wits. Mr. Craggs—yes—I am very sorry we have lost Mr. Craggs." But he looked at Clemency as he said it and seemed to sympathize with Ben, consoling her.

"Mr. Craggs, sir," observed Snitchey, "didn't find life, I regret to say, as easy to have and to hold as his theory made it out, or he would have been among us now. It's a great loss to me. He was my right arm, my right leg, my right ear, my right eye, was Mr. Craggs. I am paralytic without him. He bequeathed his share of the business to Mrs. Craggs, her executors, administrators, and assigns. His name remains in the firm to this hour. I try, in a childish sort of a way, to make believe sometimes he's alive. You may observe that I speak for self and Craggs—deceased, sir—deceased," said the tender-hearted attorney, waving his pocket-handkerchief.

Michael Warden, who had still been observant of Clemency, turned to Mr. Snitchey when he ceased to speak and whispered in his ear.

"Ah, poor thing!" said Snitchey, shaking his head. "Yes. She was always very faithful to Marion. She was always very fond of her. Pretty Marion! Poor Marion! Cheer up, mistress—you are married now, you know, Clemency."

Clemency only sighed and shook her head.

"Well, well! Wait till to-morrow," said the lawyer kindly.

"To-morrow can't bring back the dead to life, mister," said Clemency, sobbing.

"No. It can't do that, or it would bring back Mr. Craggs, deceased," returned the lawyer. "But it may bring some soothing circumstances; it may bring some comfort. Wait till to-morrow!"

So Clemency, shaking his proffered hand, said she would; and Britain, who had been terribly cast down at sight of his despondent wife (which was like the business hanging its head), said that was right; and Mr. Snitchey and Michael Warden went upstairs; and there they were soon engaged in a conversation so cautiously conducted that no murmur of it was audible above the clatter of plates and dishes, the hissing of the frying-pan, the bubbling of saucepans, the low monotonous waltzing of the jack—with a dreadful click every now and then as if it had met with some mortal accident to its head in a fit of giddiness—and all the other preparations in the kitchen for their dinner.

To-morrow was a bright and peaceful day, and nowhere were the autumn tints more beautifully seen than from the quiet orchard of the doctor's house. The snows of many winter nights had melted from that ground, the withered leaves of many summer-times had rustled there since she had fled. The honeysuckle porch was green again, the trees cast bountiful and changing shadows on the grass, the landscape was as tranquil and serene as it had ever been; but where was she?

Not there. Not there. She would have been a stranger sight in her old home now even than that home had been at first without her. But a lady sat in the familiar place, from whose heart she had never passed away; in whose true memory she lived, unchanging, youthful, radiant with all promise and all hope; in whose affection—and it was a mother's now; there was a cherished little daughter playing by her side—she had no rival, no successor; upon whose gentle lips her name was trembling then.

The spirit of the lost girl looked out of those eyes.

Those eyes of Grace, her sister, sitting with her husband in the orchard on their wedding-day and his and Marion's birthday.

He had not become a great man; he had not grown rich; he had not forgotten the scenes and friends of his youth; he had not fulfilled any one of the doctor's old predictions. But in his useful, patient, unknown visiting of poor men's homes, and in his watching of sick-beds, and in his daily knowledge of the gentleness and goodness flowering the by-paths of this world, not to be trodden down beneath the heavy foot of poverty, but springing up, elastic, in its track, and making its way beautiful, he had better learned and proved in each succeeding year the truth of his old faith. The manner of his life, though quiet and remote, had shown him how often men still entertained angels unawares, as in the olden time; and how the most unlikely forms—even some that were mean and ugly to the view and poorly clad—became irradiated by the couch of sorrow, want, and pain, and changed to ministering spirits with a glory round their heads.

He lived to better purpose on the altered battle-ground perhaps than if he had contended restlessly in more ambitious lists; and he was happy with his wife, dear Grace.

And Marion. Had he forgotten her?

"The time has flown, dear Grace," he said, "since then;" they had been talking of that night; "and yet it seems a long while ago. We count by changes and events within us. Not by years."

"Yet we have years to count by, too, since Marion was with us," returned Grace. "Six times, dear husband, counting to-night as one, we have sat here on her birthday and spoken together of that happy return, so eagerly expected and so long deferred. Ah, when will it be? When will it be?"

Her husband attentively observed her as the tears collected in her eyes; and drawing nearer said:

"But Marion told you in that farewell letter which she left for you upon your table, love, and which you read so often, that years must pass away before it could be. Did she not?"

She took a letter from her breast and kissed it, and said "Yes."

"That through these intervening years, however happy she might be, she would look forward to the time when you would meet again and all would be made clear; and that she prayed you trustfully and hopefully to do the same. The letter runs so, does it not, my dear?"

"Yes, Alfred."

"And every other letter she has written since?"

"Except the last—some months ago—in which she spoke of you, and what you then knew, and what I was to learn to-night."

He looked toward the sun, then fast declining, and said that the appointed time was sunset.

"Alfred!" said Grace, laying her hand upon his shoulder earnestly, "there is something in this letter—this old letter which you say I read so often—that I have never told you. But to-night, dear husband, with that sunset drawing near and all our life seeming to soften and become hushed with the departing day, I cannot keep it secret."

"What is it, love?"

"When Marion went away she wrote me here that you had once left her a sacred trust to me, and that now she left you, Alfred, such a trust in my hands: praying and beseeching me as I loved her and as I loved you not to reject the affection she believed (she knew, she said) you would transfer to me when the new wound was healed, but to encourage and return it."

"And make me a proud and happy man again, Grace. Did she say so?"

"She meant to make myself so blessed and honored in your love," was his wife's answer as he held her in his arms.

"Hear me, my dear!" he said. "No. Hear me so!" —and as he spoke he gently laid the head she had raised again upon his shoulder. "I know why I have never heard this passage in the letter until now. I know why no trace of it ever showed itself in any word or look of yours at that time. I know why Grace, although so true a friend to me, was hard to win to be my wife. And knowing it, my own, I know the priceless value of the heart I gird within my arms, and thank God for the rich possession!"

She wept, but not for sorrow, as he pressed her to his heart. After a brief space he looked down at the child, who was sitting at their feet playing with a little basket of flowers, and bade her look how golden and how red the sun was.

"Alfred," said Grace, raising her head quickly at these words, "the sun is going down. You have not forgotten what I am to know before it sets."

"You are to know the truth of Marion's history, my love," he answered.

"All the truth," she said imploringly. "Nothing veiled from me any more. That was the promise. Was it not?"

"It was," he answered.

"Before the sun went down on Marion's birthday. And you see it, Alfred. It is sinking fast."

He put his arm about her waist, and looking steadily into her eyes rejoined:

"That truth is not reserved so long for me to tell, dear Grace. It is to come from other lips."

"From other lips!" she faintly echoed.

"Yes. I know your constant heart, I know how brave you are, I know that to you a word of preparation is enough. You have said truly that the time is come. It is. Tell me that you have present fortitude to bear a trial—a surprise—a shock: and the messenger is waiting at the gate."

"What messenger?" she said. "And what intelligence does he bring?"

"I am pledged," he answered her, preserving his steady look, "to say no more. Do you think you understand me?"

"I am afraid to think," she said.

There was that emotion in his face, despite its steady gaze, which frightened her. Again she hid her own face on his shoulder, trembling, and entreated him to pause—a moment.

"Courage, my wife! When you have firmness to receive the messenger, the messenger is waiting at the gate. The sun is setting on Marion's birthday. Courage, courage, Grace!"

She raised her head, and looking at him told him she was ready. As she stood an looked upon him going away her face was so like Marion's as it had been in her later days at home that it was wonderful to see. He took the child with him. She called her back—she bore the lost girl's name—and pressed her to her bosom. The little creature being released again sped after him and Grace was left alone.

She knew not what she dreaded or what hoped; but remained there motionless, looking at the porch by which they had disappeared.

Ah! what was that emerging from its shadow; standing on its threshold? That figure, with its white garments rustling in the evening air; its head laid down upon her father's breast and pressed again to his loving heart! O God! was it a vision that came bursting from the old man's arms, and with a cry, and with a waving of his hands, and with a wild precipitation of itself upon her in its boundless love, sank down in her embrace?

"Oh, Marion! Marion! Oh, my sister! Oh, my heart's dear love! Oh, joy and happiness unutterable, so to meet again!"

It was no dream, no phantom conjured up by hope and fear, but Marion, sweet Marion! So beautiful, so happy, so unalloyed by care and trial, so elevated and exalted in her loveliness that as the setting sun shone brightly on her upturned face she might have been a spirit visiting the earth upon the same healing mission.

Clinging to her sister, who had dropped upon a seat and bent down over her—and smiling through her tears—and kneeling close before her, with both arms twining round her, and never turning for an instant from her face—and with the glory of the setting sun upon her brow, and with the soft tranquillity of evening gathered round them—Marion at length broke silence; her voice so calm, low, clear, and pleasant, well tuned to the time.

"When this was my dear home, Grace, as it will be now again——"

"Stay, my sweet love! A moment! Oh, Marion, to hear you speak again."

She could not bear the voice she loved so well at first.

"When this was my dear home, Grace, as it will be now again, I loved him from my soul. I loved him most devotedly. I would have died for him, though I was so young. I never slighted his affection in my secret breast for one brief instant. It was far beyond all price to me. Although it is so long ago and past and gone and everything is wholly changed, I could not bear to think that you who love so well should think I did not truly love him once. I never loved him better, Grace, than when he left this very scene upon this very day. I never loved him better, dear one, than I did that night when I left here."

Her sister, bending over her, could look into her face and hold her fast.

"But he had gained unconsciously," said Marion with a gentle smile, "another heart before I knew that I had one to give him That heart—yours, my sister!—was so yielded up in all its other tenderness to me; was so devoted and so noble that it plucked its love away and kept its secret from all eyes but mine—ah! what other eyes were quickened by such tenderness and gratitude!—and was content to sacrifice itself to me. But I knew something of its depths. I knew the struggle it had made. I knew its high, inestimable worth to him and his appreciation of it, let him love me as he would. I knew the debt I owed him. I had its great example every day before me. What you had done for me I knew that I could do, Grace, if I would, for you. I never laid my head down on my pillow but I prayed with tears to do it. I never laid my head down on my pillow but I thought of Alfred's own words on the day of his departure, and how truly he had said (for I know that, knowing you) that there were victories gained every day in struggling hearts to which these fields of battle were as nothing. Thinking more and more upon the great endurance cheerfully sustained and never known or cared for, that there must be every day and hour in that great strife of which he spoke, my trial seemed to grow light and easy. And He who knows our hearts, my dearest, at this moment, and who knows there is no drop of bitterness or grief—of anything but unmixed happiness—in mine, enabled me to make the resolution that I never would be Alfred's wife. That he should be my brother and your husband if the course I took could bring that happy end to pass; but I never would (Grace, I then loved him dearly, dearly!) be his wife!"

"Oh, Marion! oh, Marion!"

"I have tried to seem indifferent to him;" and she pressed her sister's face against her own; "but that was hard, and you were always his true advocate. I had tried to tell you of my resolution, but you would never hear me; you would never understand me. The time was drawing near for his return. I felt that I must act before the daily intercourse between us was renewed. I knew that one great pang, undergone at that time, would save a lengthened agony to all of us. I knew that if I went away then that end must follow which has followed, and which has made us both so happy, Grace! I wrote to good Aunt Martha for a refuge in her house: I did not then tell her all, but something of my story, and she freely promised it. While I was contesting that step with myself and with my love of you and home, Mr. Warden, brought here by an accident, became for some time our companion."

"I have sometimes feared of late years that this might have been," exclaimed her sister; and her countenance was ashy pale. "You never loved him—and you married him in your self-sacrifice to me!"

"He was then," said Marion, drawing her sister closer to her, "on the eve of going secretly away for a long time. He wrote to me after leaving here; told me what his condition and prospects really were and offered me his hand. He told me he had seen I was not happy in the prospect of Alfred's return. I believe he thought my heart had no part in that contract; perhaps thought I might have loved him once and did not then; perhaps thought that when I tried to seem indifferent I tried to hide indifference—I cannot tell. But I wished that you should feel me wholly lost to Alfred—hopeless to him—dead. Do you understand me, love?"

Her sister looked into her face attentively. She seemed in doubt.

"I saw Mr. Warden and I confided in his honor; charged him with my secret on the eve of his and my departure. He kept it. Do you understand me, dear?"

Grace looked confusedly upon her. She scarcely seemed to hear.

"My love, my sister!" said Marion, "recall your thoughts a moment; listen to me. Do not look so strangely on me. There are countries, dearest, where those who would abjure a misplaced passion or would strive against some cherished feeling of their hearts and conquer it retire into a hopeless solitude and close the world against themselves and worldly loves and hopes forever. When women do so they assume that name which is so dear to you and me and call each other sisters. But there may be sisters, Grace, who in the broad world out of doors, and underneath its free sky, and in its crowded places, and among its busy life, and trying to assist and cheer it and to do some good, learn the same lesson; and who, with hearts still fresh and young and open to all happiness and means of happiness, can say the battle is long past, the victory long won. And such a one am I! You understand me now?"

Still she looked fixedly upon her and made no reply.

"Oh, Grace, dear Grace," said Marion, clinging yet more tenderly and fondly to that breast from which she had been so long exiled, "if you were not a happy wife and mother—if I had no little namesake here—if Alfred, my kind brother, were not your own fond husband—from whence could I derive the ecstasy I feel to-night! But as I left here, so I have returned. My heart has known no other love, my hand has never been bestowed apart from it. I am still your maiden sister, unmarried, unbetrothed: your own old loving Marion, in whose affection you exist alone and have no partner, Grace!"

She understood her now. Her face relaxed; sobs came to her relief; and falling on her neck she wept and wept and fondled her as if she were a child again.

When they were more composed they found that the doctor and his sister, good Aunt Martha, were standing near at hand with Alfred.

"This is a weary day for me," said good Aunt Martha, smiling through her tears as she embraced her nieces, "for I lose my dear companion in making you all happy; and what can you give me in return for my Marion?"

"A converted brother," said the doctor.

"That's something, to be sure," retorted Aunt Martha, "in such a farce as——"

"No, pray don't," said the doctor penitently.

"Well, I won't," replied Aunt Martha. "But I consider myself ill-used. I don't know what's to become of me without my Marion, after we have lived together half a dozen years."

"You must come and live here, I suppose," replied the doctor. "We shan't quarrel now, Martha."

"Or you must get married, aunt," said Alfred.

"Indeed," returned the old lady, "I think it might be a good speculation if I were to set my cap at Michael Warden, who, I hear, is come home much the better for his absence in all respects. But as I knew him when he was a boy, and I was not a very young woman then, perhaps he mightn't respond. So I'll make up my mind to go and live with Marion when she marries, and until then (it will not be very long, I dare say) to live alone. What do you say, brother?"

"I've a great mind to say it's a ridiculous world altogether, and there's nothing serious in it," observed the poor old doctor.

"You might take twenty affidavits of it if you chose, Anthony," said his sister; "but nobody would believe you with such eyes as those."

"It's a world full of hearts," said the doctor, hugging his younger daughter and bending across her to hug Grace—for he couldn't separate the sisters; "and a serious world, with all its folly—even with mine, which was enough to have swamped the whole globe; and it is a world on which the sun never rises, but it looks upon a thousand bloodless battles that are some set-off against the miseries and wickedness of battle-fields; and it is a world we need be careful how we libel, Heaven forgive us, for it is a world of sacred mysteries, and its Creator only knows what lies beneath the surface of his lightest image!"

You would not be the better pleased with my rude pen if it dissected and laid open to your view the transports of this family, long severed and now reunited. Therefore I will not follow the poor doctor through his humbled recollection of the sorrow he had had when Marion was lost to him; nor will I tell how serious he had found that world to be, in which some love, deep-anchored, is the portion of all human creatures; nor how such a trifle as the absence of one little unit in the great absurd account had stricken him to the ground. Nor how, in compassion for his distress, his sister had long ago revealed the truth to him by slow degrees, and brought him to the knowledge of the heart of his self-banished daughter and to that daughter's side.

Nor how Alfred Heathfield had been told the truth, too, in the course of that then current year; and Marion had seen him and had promised him as her brother that on her birthday, in the evening, Grace should know it from her lips at last.

"I beg your pardon, doctor," said Mr. Snitchey, looking into the orchard, "but have I liberty to come in?"

Without waiting for permission, he came straight to Marion and kissed her hand quite joyfully.

"If Mr. Craggs had been alive, my dear Miss Marion," said Mr. Snitchey, "he would have had great interest in this occasion. It might have suggested to him, Mr. Alfred, that our life is not too easy perhaps; that, taken altogether, it will bear any little smoothing we can give it; but Mr. Craggs was a man who could endure to be convinced, sir. He was always open to conviction. If he were open to conviction now, I—this is weakness. Mrs. Snitchey, my dear"—at his summons that lady appeared from behind the door—"you are among old friends."

Mrs. Snitchey having delivered her congratulations took her husband aside.

"One moment, Mr. Snitchey," said that lady. "It is not in my nature to rake up the ashes of the departed."

"No, my dear," returned her husband.

"Mr. Craggs is——"

"Yes, my dear, he is deceased," said Mr. Snitchey.

"But I ask you if you recollect," pursued his wife, "that evening of the ball? I only ask you that. If you do, and if your memory has not entirely failed you, Mr. Snitchey, and if you are not absolutely in your dotage, I ask you to connect this time with that—to remember how I begged and prayed you on my knees——"

"Upon your knees, my dear?" said Mr. Snitchey.

"Yes," said Mrs. Snitchey confidently, "and you know it—to beware of that man—to observe his eye—and now to tell me whether I was right, and whether at that moment he knew secrets which he didn't choose to tell."

"Mrs. Snitchey," returned her husband in her ear, "madam, did you ever observe anything in my eye?"

"No," said Mrs. Snitchey sharply. "Don't flatter yourself."

"Because, madam, that night," he continued, twitching her by the sleeve, "it happens that we both knew secrets which we didn't choose to tell, and both knew just the same professionally. And so the less you say about such things the better, Mrs. Snitchey; and take this as a warning to have wiser and more charitable eyes another time. Miss Marion, I brought a friend of yours along with me. Here! mistress!"

Poor Clemency, with her apron to her eyes, came slowly in, escorted by her husband; the latter doleful with the presentiment that if she abandoned herself to grief the Nutmeg-Grater was done for.

"Now, mistress," said the lawyer, checking Marion as she ran toward her and interposing himself between them, "what's the matter with you?"

"The matter?" cried poor Clemency. When looking up in wonder and in indingant remonstrance, and in the added emotion of a great roar from Mr. Britain, and seeing that sweet face so well remembered close before her, she stared, sobbed, laughed, cried, screamed, embraced her, held her fast, released her, fell on Mr. Snitchey and embraced him (much to Mrs. Snitchey's indignation), fell on the doctor and embraced him, fell on Mr Britain and embraced him, and concluded by embracing herself, throwing her apron over her head, and going into hysterics behind it.

A stranger had come into the orchard after Mr. Snitchey and had remained apart near the gate, without being observed by any of the group; for they had little spare attention to bestow, and that had been monopolized by the ecstasies of Clemency. He did not appear to wish to be observed, but stood alone, with downcast eyes, and there was an air of dejection about him (though he was a gentleman of a gallant appearance) which the general happiness rendered more remarkable.

None but the quick eyes of Aunt Martha, however, remarked him at all, but almost as soon as she espied him she was in conversation with him. Presently going to where Marion stood with Grace and her little namesake, she whispered something in Marion's ear, at which she started and appeared surprised; but soon recovering from her confusion, she timidly approached the stranger, in Aunt Martha's company, and engaged in conversation with him too.

"Mr. Britain," said the lawyer putting his hand in his pocket and bringing out a legal-looking document while this was going on, "I congratulate you. You are now the whole and sole proprietor of that freehold tenement at present occupied and held by yourself as a licensed tavern or house of public entertainment, and commonly called or known by the sign of the Nutmeg-Grater. Your wife lost one house through my client, Mr. Michael Warden, and now gains another. I shall have the pleasure of canvassing you for the county one of these fine mornings."

"Would it make any difference in the vote if the sign was altered, sir?" asked Britain.

"Not in the least," replied the lawyer.

"Then," said Mr. Britain, handing him back the conveyance, "just clap in the words 'and Thimble,' will you be so good? and I'll have the two mottoes painted up in the parlor instead of my wife's portrait."

"And let me," said a voice behind them; it was the stranger's—Michael Warden's; "let me claim the benefit of those inscriptions. Mr. Heathfield and Dr. Jeddler, I might have deeply wronged you both. That I did not is no virtue of my own. I will not say that I am six years wiser than I was or better. But I have known, at any rate, that term of self-reproach. I can urge no reason why you should deal gently with me. I abused the hospitality of this house, and learned by my own demerits, with a shame I never have forgotten, yet with some profit too, I would fain hope from one," he glanced at Marion, "to whom I made my humble supplication for forgiveness when I knew her merit and my deep unworthiness. In a few days I shall quit this place forever. I entreat your pardon. Do as you would be done by! Forget and forgive!"

Time, from whom I had the latter portion of this story, and with whom I have the pleasure of a personal acquaintance of some thirty-five years' duration, informed me, leaning easily upon his scythe, that Michael Warden never went away again and never sold his house, but opened it afresh, maintained a golden mean of hospitality, and had a wife, the pride and honor of that country side, whose name was Marion. But as I have observed that Time confuses facts occasionally, I hardly know what weight to give to its authority.

THE HAUNTED MAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE GIFT BESTOWED.

EVERYBODY said so.

Far be it from me to assert that what everybody says must be true. Everybody is often as likely to be wrong as right. In the general experience, everybody has been wrong so often, and it has taken in most instances such a weary while to find out how wrong, that the authority is proved to be fallible. Everybody may sometimes be right; "but that's no rule," as the ghost of Giles Scroggins says in the ballad.

The dread word ghost recalls me.

Everybody said he looked like a haunted man. The extent of my present claim for everybody is that they were so far right. He did.

Who could have seen his hollow cheek, his sunken brilliant eye; his black attired figure, indefinably grim, although well knit and well proportioned; his grizzled hair hanging, like tangled sea-weed, about his face—as if he had been through his whole life a lonely mark for the chaffing and beating of the great deep of humanity—but might have said he looked like a haunted man?

Who could have observed his manner, taciturn, thoughtful, gloomy, shadowed by habitual reserve, retiring always and jocund never, with a distraught air of reverting to a bygone place and time or of listening to some old echoes in his mind, but might have said it was the manner of a haunted man?

Who could have heard his voice, slow-speaking, deep, and grave, with a natural fullness and melody in it which he seemed to set himself against and stop, but might have said it was the voice of a haunted man?

Who that had seen him in his inner chamber, part library and part laboratory—for he was, as the world knew, far and wide, a learned man in chemistry and a teacher on whose lips and hands a crowd of aspiring ears and eyes hung daily—who that had seen him there upon a winter night, alone, surrounded by his drugs and istruments and books; the shadow of his shaded lamp a monstrous beetle on the wall, motionless among a crowd of spectral shapes raised there by the flickering of the fire upon the quaint objects around him; some of these phantoms (the reflection of glass vessels that held liquids) trembling at heart like things that knew his power to uncombine them and to give back their component parts to fire and vapor—who that had seen him then, his work done and he pondering in his chair before the rusted grate and red flame, and moving his thin mouth as if in speech, but silent as the dead, would not have said that the man seemed haunted and the chamber too?

Who might not, by a very easy flight of fancy, have believed that everything about him took this haunted tone, and that he lived on haunted ground?

His dwelling was so solitary and vault-like—an old, retired part of an ancient endowment for students, once a brave edifice planted in an open place, but now the obsolete whim of forgotton architects; smoke-age-and-weather-darkened, squeezed on every side by the overgrowing of the great city, and choked, like an old well, with stones and bricks; its small quadrangles, lying down in very pits formed by the streets and buildings, which, in course of time, had been constructed above its heavy chimney-stacks; its old trees, insulted by the neighboring smoke, which deigned to droop so low when it was very feeble and the weather very moody; its grass plots, struggling with the mildewed earth to be grass, or to win any show of compromise; its silent pavements, unaccustomed to the tread of feet, and even to the observations of eyes, except when a stray face looked down from the upper world, wondering what nook it was; its sun-dial in a little bricked-up corner, where no sun had straggled for a hundred years, but where, in compensation for the sun's neglect, the snow would lie for weeks when it lay nowhere else, and the black east wind would spin like a huge humming-top, when in all other places it was silent and still.

His dwelling, at its heart and core—within doors—at his fireside—was so lowering and old, so crazy, yet so strong, with its worm-eaten beams of wood in the ceiling and its sturdy floor shelving downward to the great oak chimney-piece; so environed and hemmed in by the pressure of the town, yet so remote in fashion, age, and custom; so quiet, yet so thundering with echoes when a distant voice was raised or a door was shut—echoes not confined to the many low passages and empty rooms, but rumbling and grumbling till they were stifled in the heavy air of the forgotten crypt where the Norman arches were half-buried in the earth.

You should have seen him in his dwelling about twilight in the dead winter-time.

When the wind was blowing, shrill and shrewd, with the going down of the blurred sun. When it was just so dark as that the forms of things were indistinct and big—but not wholly lost. When sitters by the fire began to see wild faces and figures, mountains and abysses, ambuscades and armies, in the coals. When people in the streets bent down their heads and ran before the weather. When those who were obliged to meet it were stopped at angry corners, stung by wandering snow-flakes alighting on the lashes of their eyes—which fell too sparingly and were blown away too quickly to leave a trace upon the frozen ground. When windows of private houses closed up tight and warm. When lighted gas began to burst forth in the busy and quiet streets fast blackening otherwise. When stray pedestrians, shivering along the latter, looked down at the glowing fires in kitchens, and sharpened their sharp appetites by sniffing up the fragrance of whole miles of dinners.

When travelers by land were bitter cold and looked wearily on gloomy landscapes rustling and shuddering in the blast. When mariners at sea, outlying upon icy yards, were tossed and swung above the howling ocean dreadfully. When lighthouses, on rocks and headlands, showed solitary and watchful; and benighted sea-birds breasted on against their ponderous lanterns and fell dead. When little readers of story-books, by the firelight, trembled to think of Cassim Baba cut into quarters, hanging in the robbers' cave, or had some small misgivings that the fierce little old woman with the crutch, who used to start out of the box in the merchant Abudah's bedroom, might one of these nights be found upon the stairs in the long, cold, dusky journey up to bed.

When, in rustic places, the last glimmering of daylight died away from the ends of avenues; and the trees, arching overhead, were sullen and black. When, in parks and woods, the high wet fern and sodden moss and beds of fallen leaves and trunks of trees were lost to view in masses of impenetrable shade. When mists arose from dike, and fen, and river. When lights in old halls and in cottage windows were a cheerful sight. When the mill stopped, the wheelwright and the blacksmith shut their workshops, the turnpike-gate closed, the plow and harrow were left lonely in the fields, the laborer and team went home, and the striking of the church clock had a deeper sound than at noon and the churchyard wicket would be swung no more that night.

When twilight everywhere released the shadows, prisoned up all day, that now closed in and gathered like muttering swarms of ghosts. When they stood lowering in corners of rooms and frowned out from behind half-opened doors. When they had full possession of unoccupied apartments. When they danced upon the floors, and walls, and ceilings of inhabited chambers, while the fire was low, and withdrew like ebbing waters when it sprang into a blaze. When they fantastically mocked the shapes of household objects, making the nurse an ogress, the rocking-horse a monster, the wondering child half-scared and half-amused, a stranger to itself—the very tongs upon the hearth a straddling giant with his arms akimbo, evidently smelling the blood of Englishmen, and wanting to grind people's bones to make his bread.

When these shadows brought into the minds of older people other thoughts, and showed them different images. When they stole from their retreats, in the likenesses of forms and faces from the past, from the grave, from the deep, deep gulf, where the things that might have been and never were are always wandering.

When he sat, as already mentioned, gazing at the fire. When, as it rose and fell, the shadows went and came. When he took no heed of them with his bodily eyes; but let them come or let them go, looked fixedly at the fire. You should have seen him then.

When the sounds that had arisen with the shadows, and come out of their lurking-places at the twilight summons, seemed to make a deeper stillness all about him.

When the wind was rumbling in the chimney, and sometimes crooning, sometimes howling, in the house. When the old trees outside were so shaken and beaten that one querulous old rook, unable to sleep, protested now and then in a feeble, dozy, high-up "Caw!" When, at intervals, the window trembled, the rusty vane upon the turret-top complained, the clock beneath it recorded that another quarter of an hour was gone, or the fire collapsed and fell in with a rattle.

When a knock came at his door, in short, as he was sitting so, and roused him.

"Who's that?" said he. "Come in!"

Surely there had been no figure leaning on the back of his chair, no face looking over it. It is certain that no gliding footstep touched the floor as he lifted up his head with a start and spoke. And yet there was no mirror in the room on whose surface his own form could have cast its shadow for a moment; and something had passed darkly and gone!

"I'm humbly fearful, sir," said a fresh-colored busy man, holding the door open with his foot for the admission of himself and a wooden tray he carried, and letting it go again by very gentle and careful degrees when he and the tray had got in, lest it should close noisily, "that it's a good bit past the time to-night. But Mrs. William has been taken off her legs so often——"

"By the wind? Ay! I have heard it rising."

"By the wind, sir—that it's a mercy she got home at all. Oh, dear, yes. Yes. It was by the wind, Mr. Redlaw. By the wind."

He had, by this time, put down the tray for dinner, and was employed in lighting the lamp and spreading a cloth on the table. From this employment he desisted in a hurry to stir and feed the fire, and then resumed it; the lamp he had lighted, and the blaze that rose under his hand, so quickly changing the appearance of the room that it seemed as if the mere coming in of his fresh red face and active manner had made the pleasant alteration.

"Mrs. William is of course subject at any time, sir, to be taken off her balance by the elements. She is not formed superior to that."

"No," returned Mr. Redlaw good-naturedly, though abruptly.

"No, sir. Mrs. William may be taken off her balance by earth; as, for example, last Sunday week, when sloppy and greasy, and she going out to tea with her newest sister-in-law, and having a pride in herself, and wishing to appear perfectly spotless though pedestrian. Mrs William may be taken off her balance by air; as being once over-persuaded by a friend to try a swing at Peckham Fair, which acted on her constitution instantly like a steamboat. Mrs. William may be taken off her balance by fire; as on a false alarm of engines at her mother's. when she went two miles in her nightcap. Mrs. William may be taken off her balance by water; as at Battersea, when rowed into the piers by her young nephew, Charley Swidger junior, aged twelve, which had no idea of boats whatever. But these are elements. Mrs. William must be taken out of elements for the strength of her character to come into play."

As he stopped for a reply, the reply was "Yes," in the same tone as before.

"Yes, sir. Oh, dear, yes!" said Mr. Swidger, still proceeding with his preparations, and checking them off as he made them. "That's where it is, sir. That's what I always say myself, sir. Such a many of us Swidgers! Pepper. Why there's my father, sir, superannuated keeper and custodian of this institution, eighty-seven year old. He's a Swidger! Spoon."

"True, William," was the patient and abstracted answer when he stopped again.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Swidger. "That's what I always say, sir. You may call him the trunk of the tree! Bread. Then you come to his successor, my unworthy self—salt—and Mrs. William, Swidgers both. Knife and fork. Then you come to all my brothers and their families, Swidgers, man and woman, boy and girl. Why, what with cousins, uncles, aunts, and relationships of this, that, and t'other degree, and what-not degree, and marriages, and lyings-in, the Swidgers—tumbler—might take hold of hands and make a ring round Enlgand!"

Receiving no reply at all here from the thoughtful man whom he addressed, Mr. William approached him nearer. and made a feint of accidentally knocking the table with a decanter, to rouse him. The moment he succeeded he went on, as if in great alacrity of acquiescence.

"Yes, sir! That's just what I say myself, sir. Mrs. William and me have often said so. 'There's Swidgers enough,' we say, 'without our voluntary contributions. Butter. In fact, sir, my father is a family in himself—castors—to take care of; and it happens all for the best that we have no child of our own, though it's made Mrs. William rather quiet-like, too. Quite ready for the fowl and mashed potatoes, sir? Mrs. William said she'd dish in ten minutes when I left the lodge."

"I am quite ready," said the other, waking as from a dream and walking slowly to and fro.

"Mrs. William has been at it again, sir!" said the keeper as he stood warming a plate at the fire, and pleasantly shading his face with it. Mr. Redlaw stopped in his walking, and an expression of interest appeared in him.

"What I always say myself, sir. She will do it! There's a motherly feeling in Mrs. William's breast that must and will have vent."

"What has she done?"

"Why, sir, not satisfied with being a sort of mother to all the young gentlemen that come up from a wariety of parts to attend your courses of lectures at this ancient foundation—it's surprising how stone chaney catches the heat this frosty weather, to be sure!" Here he turned the plate and cooled his fingers.

"Well?" said Mr. Redlaw.

"That's just what I say myself, sir," returned Mr. William, speaking over his shoulder, as if in ready and delighted assent. "That's exactly where it is, sir! There ain't one of our students but appears to regard Mrs. William in that light. Every day, right through the course, they puts their heads into the lodge, one after another, and have all got something to tell her or something to ask her. 'Swidge' is the appellation by which they speak of Mrs. William in general among themselves, I'm told; but that's what I say, sir. Better be called ever so far out of your name, if it's done in real liking, than have it made ever so much of and not cared about! What's a name for? To know a person by. Mrs. William is known by something better than her name—I allude to Mrs. William's qualities and disposition—never mind her name, though it is Swidger, by rights. Let 'em call her Swidge, Widge, Bridge—Lord! London Bridge, Blackfrairs, Chelsea, Putney, Waterloo, or Hammersmith Suspension—if they like!"

The close of this triumphat oration brought him and the plate to the table, upon which he half laid and half dropped it, with a lively sense of its being thoroughly heated, just as the subject of his praises entered the room, bearing another tray and a lantern, and followed by a venerable old man with long gray hair.

Mrs. William, like Mr. William, was a simple, innocent-looking person, in whose smooth cheeks the cheerful red of her husband's official waistcoat was very pleasantly repeated. But whereas Mr. William's light hair stood on end all over his head, and seemed to draw his eyes up with it in an excess of bustling readiness for anything, the dark-brown hair of Mrs. William was carefully smoothed down, and waved away under the trim, tidy cap in the most exact and quiet manner imaginable. Whereas Mr. William's very trousers hitched themselves up at the ankles, as if it were not in their iron-gray nature to rest without looking about them, Mrs. William's neatly flowered skirts—red and white, like her own pretty face—were as composed and orderly as if the very wind that blew so hard out of doors could not disturb one of their folds. Whereas his coat had something of a fly-away and half-off appearance about the collar and breast, her little bodice was so placid and neat that there should have been protection for her in it had she needed any with the roughest people. Who could have had the heart to make so calm a bosom swell with grief, or throb with fear, or flutter with a thought of shame? To whom would its repose and peace have not appealed against disturbance like the innocent slumber of a child?

"Punctual, of course, Milly," said her husband, relieving her of the tray, "or it wouldn't be you. Here's Mrs. William, sir! He looks lonelier than ever to-night," whispering to his wife as he was taking the tray, "and ghostlier altogether."

Without any show of hurry, or noise, or any show of herself, even, she was so calm and quiet, Milly set the dishes she had brought upon the table—Mr. William, after much clattering and running about, having only gained possession of a butter-boat of gravy which he stood ready to serve.

"What is that the old man has in his arms?" asked Mr. Redlaw as he sat down to his solitary meal.

"Holly, sir," replied the quiet voice of Milly.

"That's what I say myself, sir," interposed Mr. William, striking in with the butter-boat. "Berries is so seasonable to the time of year! Brown gravy!"

"Another Christmas come, another year gone!" murmured the chemist, with a gloomy sigh. "More figures in the lengthening sum of recollection that we work and work at to our torment, till Death idly jumbles all together and rubs all out. So, Philip," breaking off, and raising his voice as he addressed the old man standing apart, with his glistening burden in his arms, from which the quiet Mrs. William took small branches, which she noiselessly trimmed with her scissors and decorated the room with, while her aged father-in-law looked on much interested in the ceremony.

"My duty to you, sir," returned the old man. "Should have spoke before, sir, but know your ways, Mr. Redlaw—proud to say—and wait till spoke to! Merry Christmas, sir, and Happy New Year, and many of 'em. Have had a pretty many of 'em myself—ha! ha!—and may take the liberty of wishing 'em. I'm eighty-seven!"

"Have you had so many that were merry and happy?" asked the other.

"Ay, sir, ever so many," returned the old man.

"Is his memory impaired with age? It is to be expected now," said Mr. Redlaw, turning to the son and speaking lower.

"Not a morsel of it, sir," replied Mr. William. "That's exactly what I say myself, sir. There never was such a memory as my father's. He's the most wonderful man in the world. He don't know what forgetting means. It's the very observation I'm always making to Mrs. William, sir, if you'll believe me!"

Mr. Swidger, in his polite desire to seem to acquiesce at all events, delivered this as if there were no iota of contradiction in it, and it were all said in unbounded and unqualified assent.

The chemist pushed his plate away, and, rising from the table, walked across the room to where the old man stood looking at a little sprig of holly in his hand.

"It recalls the time when many of those years were old and new, then?" he said, observing him attentively and touching him on the shoulder. "Does it?"

"Oh many, many!" said Philip, half-awaking from his reverie. "I'm eighty-seven!"

"Merry and happy, was it?" asked the chemist in a low voice. "Merry and happy, old man?"

"Maybe as high as that, no higher," said the old man, holding out his hand a little way above the level of his knee, and looking retrospectively at his questioner, "when I first remember 'em! Cold, sunshiny day it was, out a-walking, when some one—it was my mother as sure as you stand there, though I don't know what her blessed face was like, for she took ill and died that Christmas time—told me they were food for birds. The pretty little fellow thought—that's me, you understand—that birds' eyes were so bright, because the berries that they lived on in the winter were so bright. I recollect that. And I'm eighty-seven!"

"Merry and happy!" mused the other, bending his dark eyes upon the stooping figure, with a smile of compassion. "Merry and happy—and remember well!"

"Ay! ay! ay!" resumed the old man, catching the last words. "I remember 'em well in my school-time, year after year, and all the merry-making that used to come along with them. I was a strong chap then, Mr. Redlaw; and, if you'll believe me, hadn't my match at foot-ball within ten mile. Where's my son William? Hadn't my match at foot-ball, William, within ten mile!"

"That's what I always say, father!" returned the son promptly, and with great respect. "You are a Swidger, if ever there was one of the family!"

"Dear!" said the old man, shaking his head as he again looked at the holly. "His mother—my son William's my youngest son—and I have sat among 'em all, boys and girls, little children and babies, many a year, when the berries like these were not shining half so bright all round us as their bright faces. Many of 'em are gone; she's gone; and my son George (our eldest, who was her pride more than all the rest!) is fallen very low: but I can see them, when I look here, alive and healthy, as they used to be in those days; and I can see him, thank God, in his innocence. It's a blessed thing to me at eighty-seven."

The keen look that had been fixed upon him with so much earnestness had gradually sought the ground.

"When my circumstances got to be not so good as formerly, through not being honestly dealt by, and I first come here to be custodian," said the old man, "which was upward of fifty years ago—where's my son William? More than half a century ago, William!"

"That's what I say, father," replied the son as promptly and dutifully as before, "that's exactly where it is. Two times ought's an ought, and twice five ten, and there's a hundred of 'em."

"It was quite a pleasure to know that one of our founders—or more correctly speaking," said the old man, with a great glory in his subject and his knowledge of it, "one of the learned gentlemen that helped endow us in Queen Elizabeth's time, for we were founded afore her day—left in his will, among the other bequests he made us, so much to buy holly for garnishing the walls and windows come Christmas. There was something homely and friendly in it. Being but strange here then, and coming at Christmas time, we took a liking for his very picter that hangs in what used to be anciently, afore our ten poor gentlemen commuted for an annual stipend in money, our great dinner hall. A sedate gentleman in a peaked beard, with a ruff round his neck, and a scroll below him, in old English letters, 'Lord! keep my memory green!' You know all about him, Mr. Redlaw?"

"I know the portrait hangs there, Philip."

"Yes, sure, it's the second on the right, above the paneling. I was going to say—he has helped to keep my memory green; I thank him; for, going round the building every year, as I'm a-doing now, and freshening up the bare rooms with these branches and berries, freshens up my bare old brain. One year brings back another, and that year another, and those others numbers! At last, it seems to me as if the birth-time of our Lord was the birth-time of all I have ever had affection for, or mourned for, or delighted in—and they're a pretty many, for I'm eighty-seven!"

"Merry and happy," murmured Redlaw to himself.

The room began to darken strangely.

"So you see, sir," pursued old Philip, whose hale wintry cheek had warmed into a ruddier glow, and whose blue eyes had brightened while he spoke, "I have plenty to keep when I keep this present season. Now, where's my quiet mouse? Chattering's the sin of my time of life, and there's half the building to do yet, if the cold don't freeze us first, or the wind don't blow us away, or the darkness don't swallow us up."

The quiet mouse had brought her calm face to his side and silently taken his arm before he finished speaking.

"Come away, my dear," said the old man. "Mr. Redlaw won't settle to his dinner, otherwise, till it's cold as the winter. I hope you'll excuse me rambling on, sir, and I wish you good-night, and, once again, a merry——"

"Stay!" said Mr. Redlaw, resuming his place at the table, more, it would have seemed from his manner, to reassure the old keeper than in any remembrance of his own appetite. "Spare me another moment, Philip. William, you were going to tell me something to your excellent wife's honor. It will not be disagreeable to her to hear you praise her. What was it?"

"Why, that's where it is, you see, sir," returned Mr. William Swidger, looking toward his wife in considerable embarrassment. "Mrs. William's got her eye upon me."

"But you are not afraid of Mrs. William's eye?"

"Why, no, sir," returned Mr. Swidger; "that's what I say myself. It wasn't made to be afraid of. It wouldn't have been made so mild, if that was the intention. But I wouldn't like to—Milly!—him, you know. Down in the Buildings."

Mr. William, standing behind the table, and rummaging disconcertedly among the objects upon it, directed persuasive glances at Mrs. William, and secret jerks of his head and thumb at Mr. Redlaw, as alluring her toward him.

"Him, you know, my love," said Mr. William. "Down in the Buildings. Tell, my dear! You're the works of Shakespeare in comparison with myself. Down in the Buildings, you know, my love. Student."

"Student?" repeated Mr. Redlaw, raising his head.

"That's what I say, sir!" cried Mr. William, in the utmost animation of assent. "If it wasn't the poor student down in the Buildings, why should you wish to hear it from Mrs. William's lips? Mrs. William, my dear—Buildings."

"I didn't know," said Milly, with a quiet frankness, free from any haste or confusion, "that William had said anything about it, or I wouldn't have come. I asked him not to. It's a sick young gentleman, sir—and very poor, I am afraid—who is too ill to go home this holiday-time, and lives, unknown to any one, in but a common kind of lodging for a gentleman, down in Jerusalem Buildings. That's all, sir."

"Why have I never heard of him?" said the chemist, rising hurriedly. "Why has he not made his situation known to me? Sick?—give me my hat and cloak. Poor!—what house?—what number?"

"Oh, you mustn't go there, sir," said Milly, leaving her father-in-law and calmly confronting him with her collected little face and folded hands.

"Not go there?"

"Oh, dear, no!" said Milly, shaking her head as at a most manifest and self evident impossibility. "It couldn't be thought of!"

"What do you mean? Why not?"

"Why, you see, sir," said Mr. William Swidger persuasively and confidentially, "that's what I say. Depend upon it, the young gentleman would never have made his situation known to one of his own sex. Mrs. William has got into his confidence, but that's quite different. They all confide in Mrs. William; they all trust her. A man, sir, couldn't have got a whisper out of him; but woman, sir, and Mrs. William combined——"

"There is good sense and delicacy in what you say, William," returned Mr. Redlaw, observant of the gentle and composed face at his shoulder. And laying his finger on his lip, he secretly put his purse into her hand.

"Oh, dear, no, sir!" cried Milly, giving it back again. "Worse and worse! Couldn't be dreamed of!"

Such a staid matter-of-fact housewife she was, and so unruffled by the momentary haste of this rejection, that, an instant afterward, she was tidily picking up a few leaves which had strayed from between her scissors and her apron when she had arranged the holly.

Finding, when she rose from her stooping posture, that Mr. Redlaw was still regarding her with doubt and astonishment, she quietly repeated—looking about the while for any other fragments that might have escaped her observation:

"Oh dear no, sir! He said that of all the world he would not be known to you or receive help from you—though he is a student in your class. I have made no terms of secrecy with you, but I trust to your honor completely."

"Why did he say so?"

"Indeed I can't tell, sir," said Milly, after thinking a little, "because I am not at all clever, you know; and I wanted to be useful to him in making things neat and comfortable about him, and employed myself that way. But I know he is poor and lonely, and I think he is somehow neglected too. How dark it is!"

The room had darkened more and more. There was a very heavy gloom and shadow gathering behind the chemist's chair.

"What more about him?" he asked.

"He is engaged to be married when he can afford it," said Milly, "and is studying, I think, to qualify himself to earn a living. I have seen a long time that he has studied hard and denied himself much. How very dark it is!"

"It's turned colder, too," said the old man, rubbing his hands. "There's a chill and dismal feeling in the room. Where's my son William? William, my boy, turn the lamp and rouse the fire!"

Milly's voice resumed, like quiet music very softly played:

"He muttered in his broken sleep yesterday afternoon, after talking to me" (this was to herself), "about some one dead, and some great wrong done that could never be forgotten; but whether to him or to another person, I don't know. Not by him, I am sure."

"And, in short, Mrs. William, you see—which she wouldn't say herself, Mr. Redlaw, if she was to stop here till the new year after this next one," said Mr. William, coming up to him to speak in his ear, "has done him worlds of good! Bless you, worlds of good! All at home just the same as ever—my father made as snug and comfortable—not a crumb of litter to be found in the house if you were to offer £50 ready money for it—Mrs. William apparently never out of the way—yet Mrs. William backward and forward, backward and forward, up and down, up and down, a mother to him!"

The room turned darker and colder, and the gloom and shadow gathering behind the chair was heavier.

"Not content with this, sir, Mrs. William goes and finds this very night, when she was coming home (why, it's not above a couple of hours ago), a creature more like a young wild beast than a young child shivering upon a door-step. What does Mrs. William do but brings it home to dry it, and feed it, and keep it till our old bounty of food and flannel is given away on Christmas morning! If it ever felt a fire before, it's as much as ever it did; for it's sitting in the old lodge chimney, staring at ours as if its ravenous eyes would never shut again. It's sitting there, at least," said Mr. William, correcting himself, on reflection, "unless it's bolted!"

"Heaven keep her happy!" said the chemist aloud, "and you too, Philip! and you, William! I must consider what to do in this. I may desire to see this student. I'll not detain you longer now. Good-night!"

"I thank'ee, sir, I thank'ee!" said the old man, "for mouse, and for my son William, and for myself. Where's my son William? William, you take the lantern and go on first through them long dark passages, as you did last year and the year afore. Ha! ha! I remember, though I'm eighty-seven! 'Lord, keep my memory green!' It's a very good prayer, Mr. Redlaw, that of the learned gentleman in the peaked beard, with a ruff round his neck; hangs up second on the right above the paneling, in what used to be, afore our ten poor gentlemen commuted, our great dinner hall. 'Lord, keep my memory green!' It's very good and pious, sir. Amen! Amen!"

As they passed out and shut the heavy door, which, however carefully withheld, fired a long train of thundering reverberations when it shut at last, the room turned darker.

As he fell a-musing in his chair alone, the healthy holly withered on the wall and dropped, dead branches.

As the gloom and shadow thickened behind him, in that place where it had been gathering so darkly, it took, by slow degrees, or out of it there came, by some unreal, unsubstantial process not to be traced by any human sense, an awful likeness of himself.

Ghastly and cold, colorless in its leaden face and hands, but with his features and his bright eyes and his grizzled hair, and dressed in the gloomy shadow of his dress, it came to his terrible appearance of existence motionless without a sound. As he leaned his arm upon the elbow of his chair, ruminating before the fire, it leaned upon the chair-back close above him with its appalling copy of his face looking where his face looked and bearing the expression his face bore.

This, then, was the something that had passed and gone already. This was the dread companion of the haunted man!

It took, for some moments, no more apparent heed of him than he of it. The Christmas waits were playing somewhere in the distance, and, through his thoughtfulness, he seemed to listen too.

At length he spoke, without moving or lifting up his face.

"Here again!" he said.

"Here again!" replied the phantom.

"I see you in the fire," said the haunted man; "I hear you in music, in the wind, in the dead stillness of the night."

The phantom moved its head, assenting.

"Why do you come, to haunt me thus?"

"I come as I am called," replied the ghost.

"No. Unbidden," exclaimed the chemist.

"Unbidden be it," said the specter. "It is enough. I am here."

Hitherto the light of the fire had shone on the two faces—if the dread lineaments behind the chair might be called a face both addressed toward it, as at first, and neither looked at the other. But now the haunted man turned suddenly and stared upon the ghost. The ghost, as sudden in its motion, passed before the chair and stared on him.

The living man and the animated image of himself dead might so have looked, the one upon the other. An awful survey, in a lonely and remote part of an empty old pile of building, on a wintry night, with the loud wind going by upon its journey of mystery whence, or whither, no man knowing since the world began, and the stars, in unimaginable millions, glittering through it, from eternal space, where the world's bulk is as a grain and its hoary age is infancy.

"Look upon me!" said the specter. "I am he, neglected in my youth, and miserably poor, who strove and suffered, and still strove and suffered, until I hewed out knowledge from the mine where it was buried, and made rugged steps thereof for my worn feet too rest and rise on."

"I am that man," returned the chemist.

"No mother's self-denying love," pursued the phantom, "no father's counsel aided me. A stranger came into my father's place when I was but a child, and I was easily an alien from my mother's heart. My parents, at the best, were of that sort whose care soon ends and whose duty is soon done; who cast their offspring loose early, as birds do theirs; and, if they do well, claim the merit; and, if ill, the pity."

It paused, and seemed to tempt and goad him with its look, and with the manner of its speech, and with its smile.

"I am he," pursued the phantom, "who, in this struggle upward, found a friend. I made him—won him—bound him to me! We worked together, side by side. All the love and confidence that in my earlier youth had had no outlet and found no expression I bestowed on him."

"Not all," said Redlaw hoarsely.

"No, not at all," returned the phantom. "I had a sister."

The haunted man, with his head resting on his hands, replied "I had!" The phantom, with an evil smile, drew closer to the chair, and resting its chin upon its folded hands, its folded hands upon the back, and looking down into his face with searching eyes that seemed instinct with fire, went on:

"Such glimpses of the light of home as I had ever known had streamed from her. How young she was, how fair, how loving! I took her to the first poor roof that I was master of and made it rich. She came into the darkness of my life and made it bright. She is before me!"

"I saw her, in the fire, but now. I hear her in music, in the wind, in the dead stillness of the night," returned the haunted man.

"Did he love her?" said the phantom, echoing his contemplative tone. "I think he did once. I am sure he did. Better had she loved him less—less secretly, less dearly, from the shallower depths of a more divided heart!"

"Let me forget it," said the chemist, with an angry motion of his hand. "Let me blot it from my memory!"

The specter, without stirring and with its unwinking, cruel eyes still fixed upon his face, went on:

"A dream like hers stole upon my own life."

"It did," said Redlaw.

"A love as like hers," pursued the phantom, "as my inferior nature might cherish arose in my own heart. I was too poor to bind its object to my fortune then by any thread of promise or entreaty. I loved her far too well to seek to do it. But, more than ever I had striven in my life, I strove to climb! Only an inch gained brought me something nearer to the height. I toiled up! In the late pauses of my labor at that time my sister (sweet companion!) still sharing with me the expiring embers and the cooling hearth, when day was breaking, what pictures of the future did I see!"

"I saw them, in the fire, but now," he murmured. "They come back to me in music, in the wind, in the dead stillness of the night, in the revolving years."

"Pictures of my own domestic life in after-time, with her who was the inspiration of my toil. Pictures of my sister, made the wife of my dear friend, on equal terms, for he had some inheritance, we none—pictures of our sobered age and mellowed happiness, and of the golden links, extending back so far, that should bind us and our children in a radiant garland," said the phantom.

"Pictures," said the haunted man, "that were delusions. Why is it my doom to remember them too well!"

"Delusions," echoed the phantom in its changeless voice, and glaring on him with its changeless eyes. "For my friend (in whose breast my confidence was locked as in my own), passing between me and the center of the system of my hopes and struggles, won her to himself and shattered my frail universe. My sister, doubly dear, doubly devoted, doubly cheerful in my home, lived on to me the famous, and my old ambition so rewarded when its spring was broken, and then——"

"Then died," he interposed. "Died, gentle as ever, happy, and with no concern but for her brother. Peace!"

The phantom watched him silently.

"Remembered!" said the haunted man after a pause. "Yes. So well remembered that even now, when years have passed, and nothing is more idle or more visionary to me than the boyish love so long outlived, I think of it with sympathy, as if it were a younger brother's or son's. Sometimes I even wonder when her heart first inclined to him, and how it had been affected toward me. Not lightly once, I think. But that is nothing. Early unhappiness, a wound from a hand I loved and trusted, and a loss that nothing can replace outlive such fancies."

"Thus," said the phantom, "I bear within me a sorrow and a wrong. Thus I prey upon myself. Thus, memory is my curse; and, if I could forget my sorrow and my wrong, I would!"

"Mocker!" said the chemist, leaping up, and making, with a wrathful hand, at the throat of his other self. "Why have I always that taunt in my ears?"

"Forbear!" exclaimed the specter in an awful voice. "Lay a hand on me, and die!"

He stopped midway, as if its words had paralyzed him, and stood looking on it. It had glided from him; it had its arm raised high in warning; and a smile passed over its unearthly features as it reared its dark figure in triumph.

"If I could forget my sorrow and wrong, I would," the ghost repeated. "If I could forget my sorrow and wrong, I would!"

"Evil spirit of myself," returned the haunted man in a low, trembling tone, "my life is darkened by that incessant whisper."

"It is an echo," said the phantom.

"If it be an echo of my thoughts—as now, indeed, I know it is," rejoined the haunted man, "why should I, therefore, be tormented? It is not a selfish thought. I suffer it to range beyond myself. All men and women have their sorrows—most of them their wrongs; ingratitude, and sordid jealousy, and interest, besetting all degrees of life. Who would not forget their sorrows and their wrongs?"

"Who would not, truly, and be the happier and better for it?" said the phantom.

"These revolutions of years which we commemorate," proceeded Redlaw, "what do they recall! Are there any minds in which they do not reawaken some sorrow or some trouble? What is the remembrance of the old man who was here to-night? A tissue of sorrow and trouble."

"But common natures," said the phantom, with its evil smile upon its glassy face, "unenlightened minds and ordinary spirits, do not feel or reason on these things like men of higher cultivation and profounder thought."

"Tempter," answered Redlaw, "whose hollow look and voice I dread more than words can express, and from whom some dim foreshadowing of greater fear is stealing over me while I speak, I hear again an echo of my own mind."

"Receive it as a proof that I am powerful," returned the ghost. "Hear what I offer! Forget the sorrow, wrong, and trouble you have known!"

"Forget them!" he repeated.

"I have the power to cancel their remembrance—to leave but very faint, confused traces of them that will die out soon," returned the specter. "Say! Is it done?"

"Stay!" cried the haunted man, arresting by a terrified gesture the uplifted hand. "I tremble with distrust and doubt of you; and the dim fear you cast upon me deepens into a nameless horror I can hardly bear. I would not deprive myself of any kindly recollection or any sympathy that is good for me or others. What shall I lose if I assent to this? What else will pass from my remembrance?"

"No knowledge; no result of study; nothing but the intertwisted chain of feelings and associations, each in its turn dependent on and nourished by the banished recollections. Those will go."

"Are they so many?" said the haunted man, reflecting in alarm.

"They have been wont to show themselves in the fire, in music, in the wind, in the dead stillness of the night, in the revolving years," returned the phantom scornfully.

"In nothing else?"

The phantom held its peace.

But having stood before him silent for a little while, it moved toward the fire; then stopped.

"Decide!" it said, "before the opportunity is lost!"

"A moment! I call Heaven to witness," said the agitated man, "that I have never been a hater of my kind—never morose, indifferent, or hard to anything around me. If, living here alone, I have made too much of all that was and might have been, and too little of what is, the evil, I believe, has fallen on me, and not on others. But if there were poison in my body, should I not, possessed of antidotes and knowledge how to use them, use them? If there be poison in my mind, and through this fearful shadow I can cast it out, shall I not cast it out?"

"Say," said the specter, "is it done?"

"A moment longer!" he answered hurriedly. "I would forget it if I could! Have I thought that, alone, or has it been the thought of thousands upon thousands, generation after generation? All human memory is fraught with sorrow and trouble. My memory is as the memory of other men, but other men have not this choice. Yes, I close the bargain. Yes! I will forget my sorrow, wrong, and trouble!"

"Say," said the specter, "is it done?"

"It is!"

"It is. And take this with you, man whom I here renounce! The gift that I have given, you shall give again, go where you will. Without recovering yourself the power that you have yielded up, you shall henceforth destroy its like in all whom you approach. Your wisdom has discovered that the memory of sorrow, wrong, and trouble is the lot of all mankind, and that mankind would be the happier in its other memories without it. Go! Be its benefactor! Freed from such remembrance, from this hour, carry involuntarily the blessing of such freedom with you. Its diffusion is inseparable and inalienable from you. Go! Be happy in the good won and in the good you do!"

The phantom, which had held its bloodless hand above him while it spoke, as if in some unholy invocation or some ban, and which had gradually advanced its eyes so close to his that he could see how they did not participate in the terrible smile upon its face, but were a fixed, unalterable, steady horror, melted before him and was gone.

As he stood rooted to the spot, possessed by fear and wonder, and imagining he heard repeated in melancholy echoes dying away fainter and fainter, the words, "Destroy its like in all whom you approach!" a shrill cry reached his ears. It came not from the passage beyond the door, but from another part of the old building, and sounded like the cry of some one in the dark who had lost the way.

He looked confusedly upon his hands and limbs, as if to be assured of his identity, and then shouted in reply, loudly and wildly; for there was a strangeness and terror upon him as if he too were lost.

The cry responding, and being nearer, he caught up the lamp and raised a heavy curtain in the wall, by which he was accustomed to pass into and out of the theater where he lectured—which adjoined his room. Associated with youth and animation and a high amphitheater of faces which his entrance charmed to interest in a moment, it was a ghostly place when all his life was faded out of it, and stared upon him like an emblem of Death.

"Halloo!' he cried. "Halloo! This way! Come to the light!" When, as he held the curtain with one hand, and with the other raised the lamp and tried to pierce the gloom that filled the place, something rushed past him into the room like a wild-cat and crouched down in a corner.

"What is it?" he said hastily.

He might have asked "What is it?" even had he seen it well, as presently he did when he stood looking at it gathered up in its corner.

A bundle of tatters, held together by a hand, in size and form almost an infant's, but in its greedy, desperate little clutch a bad old man's. A face rounded and smoothed by some half-dozen years, put pinched and twisted by the experiences of a life. Bright eyes, but not youthful. Naked feet, beautiful in their childish delicacy—ugly in the blood and dirt that cracked upon them. A baby savage, a young monster, a child who had never been a child, a creature who might live to take the outward form of man, but who within would live and perish a mere beast.

Used, already, to be worried and hunted like a beast, the boy crouched down as he was looked at, and looked back again and interposed his arm to ward off the expected blow.

"I'll bite," he said "if you hit me!"

The time had been, and not many minutes since, when such a sight as this would have wrung the chemist's heart. He looked upon it now coldly, but with a heavy effort to remember something—he did not know what—he asked the boy what he did there and whence he came.

"Where's the woman?" he replied. "I want to find the woman."

"Who?"

"The woman. Her that brought me here and set me by the large fire. She was so long gone that I went to look for her and lost myself. I don't want you. I want the woman."

He made a spring, so suddenly, to get away that the dull sound of his naked feet upon the floor was near the curtain, when Redlaw caught him by his rags.

"Come! you let me go!" muttered the boy, struggling and clinching his teeth. "I've done nothing to you. Let me go, will you, to the woman!"

"That is not the way. There is a nearer one," said Redlaw, detaining him, in the same blank effort to remember some association that ought, of right, to bear upon this monstrous object. "What is your name?"

"Got none."

"Where do you live?"

"Live! What's that?"

The boy shook his hair from his eyes to look at him for a moment, and then, twisting round his legs and wrestling with him, broke again to his repetition of "You let me go, will you? I want to find the woman."

The chemist led him to the door. "This way," he said, looking at him still confusedly, but with repugnance and avoidance, growing out of his coldness. "I'll take you to her."

The sharp eyes in the child's head, wandering round the room, lighted on the table where the remnants of the dinner were.

"Give me some of that!" he said covetously.

"Has she not fed you?"

"I shall be hungry again to-morrow, shan't I? Ain't I hungry every day?" Finding himself released, he bounded at the table like some small animal of prey, and hugging to his breast bread and meat and his own rags all together, said:

"There! Now take me to the woman!"

As the chemist, with a new-born dislike to touch him, sternly motioned him to follow and was going out of the door, he trembled and stopped.

"The gift that I have given, you shall give again, go where you will!"

The phantom's words were blowing in the wind, and the wind blew chill upon him.

"I'll not go there to-night," he murmured faintly. "I'll go nowhere to-night. Boy! straight down this long-arched passage, and past the great dark door into the yard—you see the fire shining on the window there."

"The woman's fire?" inquired the boy.

He nodded, and the naked feet had sprung away. He came back with his lamp, locked his door hastily, and sat down in his chair, covering his face like one who was frightened at himself.

For now he was, indeed, alone. Alone, alone.

CHAPTER II.

THE GIFT DIFFUSED.

A SMALL man sat in a small parlor, partitioned off from a small shop by a small screen, pasted all over with small scraps of newspapers. In company with the small man was almost any amount of small children you may please to name—at least, it seemed so; they made, in that very limited sphere of action, such an imposing effect in point of numbers.

Of these small fry, two had, by some strong machinery, been got into bed in a corner, where they might have reposed snugly enough in the sleep of innocence but for a constitutional propensity to keep awake and also to scuffle in and out of bed. The immediate occasion of these predatory dashes at the waking world was the construction of an oyster-shell wall in a corner by two other youths of tender age; on which fortification the two in bed made harassing descents (like those accursed Picts and Scots who beleaguer the early historical studies of most young Britons) and then withdrew to their own territory. In addition to the stir attendant on these inroads and the retorts of the invaded who pursued hotly and made lunges at the bedclothes, under which the marauders took refuge, another little boy, in another little bed, contributed his mite of confusion to the family stock by casting his boots upon the waters; in other words, by launching these and several small objects inoffensive in themselves, though of a hard substance considered as missiles, at the disturbers of his repose—who were not slow to return these compliments.

Besides which, another little boy—he biggest there, but still little—was tottering to and fro, bent on one side and considerably affected in his knees by the weight of a large baby, which he was supposed, by a fiction that obtains sometimes in sanguine families, to be hushing to sleep. But oh! the inexhaustible regions of contemplation and watchfulness into which this baby's eyes were then only beginning to compose themselves to stare over his unconscious shoulder!

It was a very Moloch of a baby, on whose insatiate altar the whole existence of this particular young brother was offered up a daily sacrifice. Its personality may be said to have consisted in its never being quiet in any one place for five consecutive minutes and never going to sleep when required. "Tetterby's baby" was as well known in the neighborhood as the postman or the pot-boy. It roved from door-step to door-step in the arms of little Johnny Tetterby, and lagged heavily at the rear of troops of juveniles who followed the tumblers or the monkey, and came up, all on one side, a little too late for everything that was attractive, from Monday morning until Saturday night. Wherever childhood congregated to play, there was little Moloch making Johnny fag and toil. Wherever Johnny desired to stay, little Moloch became fractious and would not remain. Whenever Johnny wanted to go out, Moloch was asleep, and must be watched. Whenever Johnny wanted to stay at home, Moloch was awake and must be taken out. Yet Johnny was verily persuaded that it was a faultless baby, without its peer in the realm of England, and was quite content to catch meek glimpses of things in general from behind its skirts or over its limp flapping bonnet, and to go staggering about with it like a very little porter with a very large parcel, which was not directed to anybody and could never be delivered anywhere.

The small man who sat in the small parlor, making fruitless attempts to read his newspaper peaceably in the midst of this disturbance, was the father of the family and the chief of the firm described in the inscription over the little shop front by the name and title of A. Tetterby & Co., Newsmen. Indeed, strictly speaking, he was the only personage answering to that designation, as Co. was a mere poetical abstraction, altogether baseless and impersonal.

Tetterby's was the corner shop in Jerusalem Buildings. There was a good show of literature in the window, chiefly consisting of picture-newspapers out of date, and serial pirates, and footpads. Walking-sticks, likewise, and marbles were included in the stock in trade. It had once extended into the light confectionery line; but it would seem that those elegances of life were not in demand about Jerusalem Buildings, for nothing connected with that branch of commerce remained in the window, except a sort of small glass lantern containing a languishing mass of bull's eyes, which had melted in the summer and congealed in the winter, until all hope of ever getting them out, or of eating them without eating the lantern too, was gone for ever. Tetterby's had tried its hand at several things. It had once made a feeble little dart at the toy business; for, in another lantern, there was a heap of minute wax dolls, all sticking together upside down, in the direst confusion, with their feet on one another's heads, and a precipitate of broken arms and legs at the bottom. It had made a move in the millinery direction, which a few dry, wiry bonnet-shapes remained in a corner of the window to attest. It had fancied that a living might lie hidden in the tobacco trade, and had stuck up a representation of a native of each of the three integral portions of the British empire in the act of consuming that fragrant weed, with a poetic legend attached importing that in one cause they sat and joked, one chewed tobacco, one took snuff, one smoked; but nothing seemed to have come of it—except flies. Time had been when it had put a forlorn trust in imitative jewelry, for in one pane of glass there was a card of cheap seals, and another of pencil-cases, and a mysterious black amulet of inscrutable intention, labeled ninepence. But to that hour Jerusalem Buildings had bought none of them. In short, Tetterby's had tried so hard to get a livelihood out of Jerusalem Buildings in one way or other, and appeared to have done so indifferently in all, that the best position in the firm was too evidently Co.'s; Co., as a bodiless creation, being untroubled with the vulgar inconveniences of hunger and thirst, being chargeable neither to the poor's-rates nor the assessed taxes, and having no young family to provide for.

Tetterby himself, however, in his little parlor, as already mentioned, having the presence of a young family impressed upon his mind in a manner too clamorous to be disregarded, or to comport with the quiet perusal of a newspaper, laid down his paper, wheeled, in his distraction, a few times round the parlor, like an undecided carrier-pigeon, made an ineffectual rush at one or two flying little figures in bed-gowns that skimmed past him, and then, bearing suddenly down upon the only unoffending member of the family, boxed the ears of little Moloch's nurse.

"You bad boy!" said Mr. Tetterby, "haven't you any feeling for your poor father after the fatigues and anxieties of a hard winter's day, since five o'clock in the morning, but must you wither his rest and corrode his latest intelligence with your wicious tricks? Isn't it enough, sir, that your brother 'Dolphus is toiling and moiling in the fog and cold, and you rolling in the lap of luxury with a—with a baby, and everything you can wish for," said Mr. Tetterby, heaping this up as a great climax of blessings, "but must you make a wilderness of home, and maniacs of your parents? Must you Johnny? Hey?" At each interrogation, Mr. Tetterby made a feint of boxing his ears again, but thought better of it, and held his hand.

"Oh, father!" whimpered Johnny, "when I wasn't doing anything, I'm sure, but taking such care of Sally, and getting her to sleep. Oh, father!"

"I wish my little woman would come home!" said Mr. Tetterby, relenting and repenting, "I only wish my little woman would come home! I ain't fit to deal with 'em. They make my head go round, and get the better of me. Oh, Johnny! Isn't it enough that your dear mother has provided you with that sweet sister?" indicating Moloch; "isn't it enough that you were seven boys before, without a ray of gal, and that your dear mother went through what she did go through on purpose that you might all of you have a little sister, but must you so behave yourself as to make my head swim?"

Softening more and more as his own tender feelings and those of his injured son were worked on, Mr. Tetterby concluded by embracing him and immediately breaking away to catch one of the real delinquents. A reasonably good start occurring, he succeeded, after a short but smart run, and some rather severe cross-country work under and over the bedsteads and in and out among the intricacies of the chairs, in capturing his infant, whom he condignly punished and bore to bed. This example had a powerful and apparently mesmeric influence on him of the boots, who instantly fell into a deep sleep, though he had been, but a moment before, broad awake, and in the highest possible feather. Nor was it lost upon the two young architects, who retired to bed, in an adjoining closet, with great privacy and speed. The comrade of the intercepted one also shrinking into his nest with similar discretion, Mr. Tetterby, when he paused for breath, found himself unexpectedly in a scene of peace.

"My little woman herself," said Mr. Tetterby, wiping his flushed face, "could hardly have done it better! I only wish my little woman had had it to do, I do indeed!"

Mr. Tetterby sought upon his screen for a passage appropriate to be impressed upon his children's minds on the occasion, and read the following:

"'It is an undoubted fact that all remarkable men have had remarkable mothers, and have respected them in after life as their best friends.' Think of your own remarkable mother, my boys," said Mr. Tetterby, "and know her value while she is still among you!"

He sat down in his chair by the fire, and composed himself, cross-legged, over his newspaper.

"Let anybody, I don't care who it is, get out of bed again," said Tetterby as a general proclamation, delivered in a very soft-hearted manner, "and astonishment will be the portion of that respected contemporary!"—which expression Mr. Tetterby selected from his screen. "Johnny, my child, take care of your only sister, Sally; for she's the brightest gem that ever sparkled on your early brow."

Johnny sat down on a little stool, and devotedly crushed himself beneath the weight of Moloch.

"Ah, what a gift that baby is to you, Johnny!" said his father, "and how thankful you ought to be! 'It is not generally known,' Johnny," he was now referring to the screen again, " 'but it is a fact, ascertained by accurate calculations, that the following immense percentage of babies never attain to two years old; that is to say' "—

"Oh, don't, father, please!" cried Johnny. "I can't bear it, when I think of Sally."

Mr. Tetterby desisting, Johnny, with a profounder sense of his trust, wiped his eyes, and hushed his sister.

"Your brother 'Dolphus," said his father, poking the fire, "is late to-night, Johnny, and will come home like a lump of ice. What's got your precious mother?"

"Here's mother, and 'Dolphus, too, father!" exclaimed Johnny, "I think."

"You're right!" returned his father, listening. "Yes, that's the footstep of my little woman."

The process of induction, by which Mr. Tetterby had come to the conclusionn that his wife was a little woman, was his own secret. She would have made two editions of himself very easily. Considered as an individual, she was rather remarkable for being robust and portly; but considered with reference to her husband, her dimensions became magnificent. Nor did they assume a less imposing proportion when studied with reference to the size of her seven sons, who were but diminutive. In the case of Sally, however, Mrs. Tetterby had asserted herself at last, as nobody knew better than the victim Johnny, who weighed and measured that exacting idol every hour in the day.

Mrs. Tetterby, who had been marketing and carried a basket, threw back her bonnet and shawl, and sitting down fatigued, commanded Johnny to bring his sweet charge to her straightway for a kiss. Johnny having complied, and gone back to his stool, and again crushed himself, Master Adolphus Tetterby, who had by this time unwound his Torso out of a prismatic comforter, apparently interminable, requested the same favor. Johnny having again complied, and again gone back to his stool, and again crushed himself, Mr. Tetterby, struck by a sudden thought, preferred the same claim on his own parental part. The satisfaction of this third desire completely exhausted the sacrifice, who had hardly breath enough left to get back to his stool, crush himself again, and pant at his relations.

"Whatever you do, Johnny," said Mrs. Tetterby, shaking her head, "take care of her, or never look your mother in the face again."

"Nor your brother," said Adolphus.

"Nor your father, Johnny," added Mr. Tetterby.

Johnny, much affected by this conditional renunciation of him, looked down at Moloch's eyes to see that they were all right, so far, and skillfully patted her back (which was uppermost), and rocked her with his foot.

"Are you wet, 'Dolphus, my boy?" said his father. "Come and take my chair and dry yourself."

"No, father, thank'ee," said Adolphus, smoothing himself down with his hands. "I ain't very wet, I don't think. Does my face shine much, father?"

"Well, it does look waxy, my boy," returned Mr. Tetterby.

"It's the weather, father," said Adolphus, polishing his cheeks on the worn sleeve of his jacket. "What with rain, and sleet, and wind, and snow, and fog, my face gets quite brought out into a rash sometimes. And shines, it does—oh, don't it, though!"

Master Adolphus was also in the newspaper line of life, being employed, by a more thriving firm than his father and Co., to vend newspapers at a railway station, where his chubby little person, like a shabbily disguised Cupid, and his shrill little voice (he was not much more than ten years old), were as well known as the hoarse panting of the locomotives running in and out. His juvenility might have been at some loss for a harmless outlet, in this early aplication to traffic, but for a fortunate discovery he made of a means of entertaining himself, and of dividing the long day into stages of interest, without neglecting business. This ingenious invention, remarkable, like many great discoveries, for its simplicity, consisted in varying the first vowel in the word "paper," and submitting, in its stead, at different periods of the day, all the other vowels in grammatical succession. Thus, before daylight in the winter-time, he went to and fro, in his little oilskin cap and cape, and his big comforter, piercing the heavy air with his cry of "Morn-ing Pa-per!" which, about an hour before noon, changed to "Morn-ing Pep-per!" which, at about two, changed to Morn-ing Pip-per!" which, in a couple of hours, changed to "Morn-ing Pop-per!" and so declined with the sun into "Evening Pup-per!" to the great relief and comfort of this young gentleman's spirits.

Mrs. Tetterby, his lady-mother, who had been sitting with her bonnet and shawl thrown back, as aforesaid, thoughtfully turning her wedding-ring round and round upon her finger, now rose, and divesting herself of her out-of-door attire, began to lay the cloth for supper.

"Ah, dear me, dear me, dear me!" said Mrs. Tetterby. "That's the way the world goes!"

"Which is the way he world goes, my dear?" asked Mr. Tetterby, looking round.

"Oh, nothing!" said Mrs. Tetterby.

Mr. Tetterby, elevated his eyebrows, folded his newspaper afresh, and carried his eyes up it, and down it, and across it, but was wandering in his attention, and not reading it.

Mrs. Tetterby, at the same time, laid the cloth, but rather as if she were punishing the table than preparing the family supper, hitting it unnecessarily hard with the knives and forks, slapping it with the plates, dinting it with the salt-cellar, and coming heavily down upon it with the loaf.

"Ah, dear me, dear me, dear me!" said Mrs. Tetterby. "That's the way the world goes!"

"My duck," returned her husband, looking round again, "you said that before. Which is the way the world goes?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Mrs. Tetterby.

"Sophia!" remonstrated her husband, "you said that before, too."

"Well, I'll say it again if you like," returned Mrs. Tetterby. "Oh nothing—there! And again if you like, oh nothing—there! And again if you like, oh nothing—now then!"

Mr. Tetterby brought his eye to bear upon the partner of his bosom, and said, in mild astonishment:

"My little woman, what has put you out?"

"I'm sure I don't know," she retorted. "Don't ask me. Who said I was put out at all? I never did."

Mr. Tetterby gave up the perusal of his newspaper as a bad job, and taking a slow walk across the room, with his hands behind him and his shoulders raised—his gait according perfectly with the resignation of his manner—addressed himself to his two eldest offspring.

"Your supper will be ready in a minute, 'Dolphus," said Mr. Tetterby. "Your mother has been out in the wet to the cook's shop to buy it. It was very good of your mother so to do. You shall get some supper too, very soon, John. Your mother's pleased with you, my man, for being so attentive to your precious sister."

Mrs. Tetterby, without any remark, but with a decided subsidence of her animosity toward the table, finished her preparations, and took from her ample basket a substantial slab of hot pease pudding wrapped in paper, and a basin covered with a saucer, which, on being uncovered, sent forth an odor so agreeable that the three pair of eyes in the two beds opened wide and fixed themselves upon the banquet. Mr. Tetterby, without regarding this tacit invitation to be seated, stood repeating slowly, "Yes, yes, your supper will be ready in a minute, 'Dolphus—your mother went out in the wet to the cook's shop to buy it. It was very good of your mother so to do"—until Mrs. Tetterby, who had been exhibiting sundry tokens of contrition behind him, caught him round the neck and wept.

"Oh, 'Dolphus!" said Mrs. Tetterby, "how could I go and behave so?"

This reconciliation affected Adolphus the younger and Johnny to that degree that they both, as with one accord, raised a dismal cry, which had the effect of immediately shutting up the round eyes in the beds and utterly routing the two remaining little Tetterbys, just then stealing in from the adjoining closet to see what was going on in the eating way.

"I am sure, 'Dolphus," sobbed Mrs. Tetterby, "coming home, I had no more idea than a child unborn——"

Mr. Tetterby seemed to dislike this figure of speech, and observed, "Say than the baby, my dear."

"—Had no more idea than the baby," said Mrs. Tetterby,—"Johnny, don't look at me, but look at her, or she'll fall out of your lap and be killed, and then you'll die in agonies of a broken heart, and serve you right.—No more idea I hadn't than that darling of being cross when I came home; but somehow, 'Dolphus——" Mrs. Tetterby paused, and again turned her wedding-ring round and round upon her finger.

"I see!" said Mr. Tetterby. "I understand! My little woman was put out. Hard times, and hard weather, and hard work, make it trying now and then. I see, bless your soul! No wonder! 'Dolf, my man," continued Mr. Tetterby, exploring the basin with a fork, "here's your mother been and bought at the cook's shop, besides pease pudding, a whole knuckle of a lovely roast leg of pork, with lots of crackling left upon it, and with seasoning gravy and mustard quite unlimited. Hand in your plate, my boy, and begin while it's simmering."

Master Adolphus, needing no second summons, received his portion with eyes rendered moist by appetite, and withdrawing to his particular stool, fell upon his supper tooth and nail. Johnny was not forgotten, but received his rations on bread, lest he should in a flush of gravy, trickle any on the baby. He was required, for similar reasons, to keep his pudding, when not on active service, in his pocket.

There might have been more pork on the knucklebone —which knucklebone the carver at the cook's shop had assuredly not forgotten in carving for previous customers —but there was no stint of seasoning, and that is an accessory dreamily suggesting pork and pleasantly cheating the sense of taste. The pease pudding, too, the gravy and mustard, like the Eastern rose in respect of the nightingale, if they were not absolutely pork, had lived near it; so, upon the whole, there was the flavor of a middle-sized pig. It was irresistible to the Tetterbys in bed, who, though professing to slumber peacefully, crawled out when unseen by their parents, and silently appealed to their brothers for any gastronomic token of fraternal affection. They, not hard at heart, presenting scraps in return, it resulted that a party of light skirmishers in night-gowns were careering about the parlor all through supper, which harassed Mr. Tetterby exceedingly, and once or twice imposed upon him the necessity of a charge, before which these guerilla troops retired in all directions and in great confusion.

Mrs. Tetterby did not enjoy her supper. There seemed to be something on Mrs. Tetterby's mind. At one time she laughed without reason, and at another time she cried without reason, and at last she laughed and cried together in a manner so very unreasonable that her husband was confounded.

"My little woman," said Mr. Tetterby, "if the world goes that way, it appears to go the wrong way, and to choke you."

"Give me a drop of water," said Mrs. Tetterby, struggling with herself, "and don't speak to me for the present, or take any notice of me. Don't do it!"

Mr. Tetterby having administered the water, turned suddenly on the unlucky Johnny (who was full of sympathy), and demanded why he was wallowing there, in gluttony and idleness, instead of coming forward with the baby, that the sight of her might revive his mother. Johnny immediately approached, borne down by its weight; but Mrs. Tetterby holding out her hand to signify that she was not in a condition to bear that trying appeal to her feelings, he was interdicted from advancing another inch, on pain of perpetual hatred from all his dearest connections, and accordingly retired to his stool again and crushed himself as before.

After a pause, Mrs. Tetterby said she was better now, and began to laugh.

"My little woman," said her husband, dubiously, "are you quite sure you're better? Or are you, Sophia, about to break out in a fresh direction?"

"No, 'Dolphus, no," replied his wife. "I'm quite myself." With that, settling her hair, and pressing the palms of her hands upon her eyes, she laughed again.

"What a wicked fool I was to think so for a moment!" said Mrs. Tetterby. "Come nearer, 'Dolphus, and let me ease my mind and tell you what I mean. Let me tell you all about it."

Mr. Tetterby bringing his chair closer, Mrs. Tetterby laughed again, gave him a hug, and wiped her eyes.

"You know, 'Dolphus, my dear," said Mrs. Tetterby, "that when I was single I might have given myself away in several directions. At one time, four after me at once; two of them were sons of Mars."

"We're all sons of Ma's, my dear," said Mr. Tetterby, "jointly with Pa's."

"I don't mean that," replied his wife, "I mean soldiers—serjeants."

"Oh!" said Mr. Tetterby.

"Well, 'Dolphus, I'm sure I never think of such things now, to regret them; and I'm sure I've got as good a husband, and would do as much to prove that I was fond of him as—"

"As any little woman in the world," said Mr. Tetterby. "Very good. Very good."

If Mr. Tetterby had been ten feet high, he could not have pressed a gentler consideration for Mrs. Tetterby's fairy-like stature; and if Mrs. Tetterby had been two feet high, she could not have felt it more appropriately her due.

"But, you see, 'Dolphus," said Mrs. Tetterby, "this being Christmas-time, when all people who can, make holiday, and when all people who have got money, like to spend some, I did, somehow, get a little out of sorts when I was in the streets just now. There were so many things to be sold—such delicious things to eat, such fine things to look at, such delightful things to have—and there was so much calculating and calculating necessary, before I durst lay out a sixpence for the commonest thing; and the basket was so large, and wanted so much in it; and my stock of money was so small, and would go such a little way;—you hate me, don't you, 'Dolphus!"

"Not quite," said Mr. Tetterby, "as yet."

"Well! I'll tell you the whole truth," pursued his wife penitently, "and then perhaps you will. I felt all this, so much, when I was trudging about in the cold, and when I saw a lot of other calculating faces and large baskets trudging about, too, that I began to think whether I mightn't have done better, and been happier, if—I hadn't—" the wedding-ring went round again, and Mrs. Tetterby shook her downcast head as she turned it.

"I see," said her husband quietly; "if you hadn't married at all, or if you had married somebody else?"

"Yes," sobbed Mrs. Tetterby. "That's really what I thought. Do you hate me now, 'Dolphus?"

"Why, no," said Mr. Tetterby; "I don't find that I do, as yet."

Mrs. Tetterby gave him a thankful kiss and went on.

"I begin to hope you won't now, 'Dolphus, though I am afraid I haven't told you the worst. I can't think what came over me. I don't know whether I was ill, or mad, or what I was, but I couldn't call up anything that seemed to bind us to each other, or to reconcile me to my fortune. All the pleasures and enjoyments we had ever had—they seemed so poor and insignificant, I hated them. I could have trodden on them. And I could think of nothing else, except our being poor, and the number of mouths there were at home."

"Well, well, my dear," said Mr. Tetterby, shaking her hand encouragingly, "that's truth after all. We are poor, and there are a number of mouths at home here."

"Ah! but, Dolf, Dolf!" cried his wife, laying her hands upon his neck, "my good, kind, patient fellow, when I had been at home a very little while—how different! Oh, Dolf, dear, how different it was! I felt as if here was a rush of recollection on me, all at once, that softened my hard heart and filled it up till it was bursting. All our struggles for a livelihood, all our cares and wants since we have been married, all the times of sickness, all the hours of watching, we have ever had, by one another, or by the children, seemed to speak to me, and say that they had made us one, and that I never might have been, or could have been, or would have been, any other than the wife and mother I am. Then, the cheap enjoyments that I could have trodden on so cruelly, got to be so precious to me—Oh so priceless, and dear!—that I couldn't bear to think how much I had wronged them; and I said, and say again a hundred times, how could I ever behave so, 'Dolphus, how could I ever have the heart to do it!"

The good woman, quite carried away by her honest tenderness and remorse, was weeping with all her heart, when she started up with a scream, and ran behind her husband. Her cry was so terrified, that the children started from their sleep and from their beds, and clung about her. Nor did her gaze belie her voice, as she pointed to a pale man in a black cloak who had come into the room.

"Look at that man! Look there! What does he want?"

"My dear," returned her husband, "I'll ask him if you'll let me go. What's the matter? How you shake!"

"I saw him in the street, when I was out just now. He looked at me, and stood near me. I am afraid of him."

"Afraid of him! Why?"

"I don't know why—I—stop! husband!" for he was going towards the stranger.

She had one hand pressed upon her forehead, and one upon her breast; and there was a peculiar fluttering all over her, and a hurried, unsteady motion of her eyes, as if she had lost something.

"Are you ill, my dear?"

"What is it that is going from me again?" she muttered, in a low voice. "What is this that is going away?"

Then she abruptly answered: "Ill? No, I am quite well," and stood looking vacantly at the floor.

Her husband, who had not been altogether free from the infection of her fear at first, and whom the present strangeness of her manner did not tend to reassure, addressed himself to the pale visitor in the black cloak, who stood still, and whose eyes were bent upon the ground.

"What may be your pleasure, sir," he asked, "with us?"

"I fear that my coming in unperceived," returned the visitor, "has alarmed you; but you were talking and did not hear me."

"My little woman says—perhaps you heard her say it," returned Mr. Tetterby, "that it's not the first time you have alarmed her to-night?"

"I am sorry for it. I remember to have observed her, for a few moments only, in the street. I had no intention of frightening her."

As he raised his eyes in speaking, she raised hers. It was extraordinary to see what dread she had of him, and with what dread he observed it—and yet how narrowly and closely.

"My name," he said, "is Redlaw. I come from the old college hard by. A young gentleman who is a student there, lodges in your house, does he not?"

"Mr. Denham?" said Tetterby.

"Yes."

It was a natural action, and so slight as to be hardly noticeable; but the little man, before speaking again, passed his hand across his forehead, and looked quickly round the room, as though he were sensible of some change in its atmosphere. The chemist, instantly transferring to him the look of dread he had directed towards the wife, stepped back, and his face turned paler.

"The gentleman's room," said Tetterby, "is up stairs, sir. There's a more convenient private entrance; but as you have come in here, it will save your going out into the cold, if you'll take this little staircase," showing one communicating directly with the parlor, "and go up to him that way, if you wish to see him."

"Yes, I wish to see him," said the chemist. "Can you spare a light?"

The watchfulness of his haggard look, and the inexplicable distrust that darkened it, seemed to trouble Mr. Tetterby. He paused, and looking fixedly at him in return, stood for a minute or so like a man stupefied, or fascinated.

At length he said, "I'll light you, sir, if you'll follow me."

"No," replied the chemist, "I don't wish to be attended, or announced to him. He does not expect me. I would rather go alone. Please to give me the light, if you can spare it, and I'll find the way."

In the quickness of his expression of this desire, and in taking the candle from the newsman, he touched him on the breast. Withdrawing his hand hastily, almost as though he had wounded him by accident (for he did not know in what part of himself his new power resided, or how it was communicated, or how the manner of its reception varied in different persons), he turned and ascended the stair.

But when he reached the top, he stopped and looked down. The wife was standing in the same place, twisting her ring round and round upon her finger. The husband, with his head bent forward on his breast, was musing heavily and sullenly. The children, still clustering about the mother, gazed timidly after the visitor, and nestled together when they saw him looking down.

"Come!" said the father, roughly. "There's enough of this. Get to bed here!"

"The place is inconvenient and small enough," the mother added, "without you. Get to bed!"

The whole brood, scared and sad, crept away; little Johnny and the baby lagging last. The mother, glancing contemptuously round the sordid room, and tossing from her the fragments of their meal, stopped on the threshold of her task of clearing the table, and sat down, pondering idly and dejectledy. The father betook himself to the chimney-corner, and impatiently raking the small fire together, bent over it as if he would monopolize it all. They did not interchange a word.

The chemist, paler than before, stole upward like a thief; looking back upon the change below, and dreading equally to go on or return.

"What have I done!" he said, confusedly. "What am I going to do!"

"To be the benefactor of mankind," he thought he heard a voice reply.

He looked round, but there was nothing there; and a passage now shutting out the little parlor from his view, he went on, directing his eyes before him at the way he went.

"It is only since last night," he muttered gloomily, "that I have remained shut up, and yet all things are strange to me. I am strange to myself. I am here, as in a dream. What interest have I in this place, or in any place that I can bring to my remembrance? My mind is going blind!"

There was a door before him, and he knocked at it. Being invited, by a voice within, to enter, he complied.

"Is that my kind nurse?" said the voice. "But I need not ask her. There is no one else to come here."

It spoke cheerfully, though in a languid tone, and attracted his attention to a young man lying on a couch, drawn before the chimney-piece, with the back towards the door. A meagre, scanty stove, pinched and hollowed like a sick man's cheeks, and bricked into the centre of a hearth that it could scarcely warm, contained the fire, to which his face was turned. Being so near the windy house-top, it wasted quickly, and with a busy sound, and the burning ashes dropped down fast.

"They chink when they shoot out here," said the student, smiling, "so, according to the gossips, they are not coffins, but purses. I shall be well and rich yet, some day, if it please God, and shall live perhaps to love a daughter Milly, in remembrance of the kindest nature and the gentlest heart in the world."

He put up his hand as if expecting her to take it, but, being weakened, he lay still, with his face resting on his other hand, and did not turn round.

The chemist glanced about the room—at the student's books and papers, piled upon a table in a corner, where they, and his extinguished reading-lamp, now prohibited and put away, told of the attentive hours that had gone before this illness, and perhaps caused it; at such signs of his old health and freedom, as the out-of-door attire that hung idle on the wall;—at those remembrances of other and less solitary scenes, the little miniatures upon the chimney-piece, and the drawing of home;—at that token of his emulation, perhaps, in some sort, of his personal attachment, too, the framed engraving of himself, the looker-on. The time had been, only yesterday, when not one of these objects, in its remotest association of interest with the living figure before him, would have been lost on Redlaw. Now, they were but objects; or, if any gleam of such connection shot upon him, it perplexed, and not enlightened him, as he stood looking round with a dull wonder.

The student, recalling the thin hand which had remained so long untouched, raised himself on the couch, and turned his head.

"Mr. Redlaw!" he exclaimed, and started up.

Redlaw put out his arm.

"Don't come nearer to me. I will sit here. Remain you, where you are!"

He sat down on a chair near the door, and having glanced at the young man standing leaning with his hand upon the couch, spoke with his eyes averted towards the ground.

"I heard, by an accident, by what accident is no matter, that one of my class was ill and solitary. I received no other description of him, than that he lived in this street. Beginning my inquiries at the first house in it, I have found him."

"I have been ill, sir," returned the student, not merely with a modest hesitation, but with a kind of awe of him, "but am greatly better. An attack of fever—of the brain, I believe—has weakened me, but I am much better. I cannot say I have been solitary, in my illness, or I should forget the ministering hand that has been near me."

"You are speaking of the keeper's wife," said Redlaw.

"Yes." The student bent his head, as if he rendered her some silent homage.

The chemist, in whom there was a cold, monotonous apathy, which rendered him more like a marble image on the tomb of the man who had started from his dinner yesterday at the first mention of this student's case, than the breathing man himself, glanced again at the student leaning with his hand upon the couch, and looked upon the ground, and in the air, as if for light for his blinded mind.

"I remembered your name," he said, "when it was mentioned to me down stairs, just now; and I recollect your face. We have held but very little personal communication together?"

"Very little."

"You have retired and withdrawn from me, more than any of the rest, I think?"

The student signified assent.

"And why?" said the chemist; not with the least expression of interest, but with a moody, wayward kind of curiosity. "Why? How comes it that you have sought to keep especially from me, the knowledge of your remaining here, at this season, when all the rest have dispersed, and of your being ill? I want to know why this is?"

The young man, who had heard him with increasing agitation, raised his downcast eyes to his face, and clasping his hands together, cried with sudden earnestness and with trembling lips:

"Mr. Redlaw! You have discovered me. You know my secret!"

"Secret?" said the chemist, harshly. "I know?"

"Yes! Your manner, so different from the interest and sympathy which endear you to so many hearts, your altered voice, the constraint there is in everything you say, and in your looks," replied the student, "warn me that you know me. That you would conceal it, even now, is but a proof to me (God knows I need none!) of your natural kindness, and of the bar there is between us."

A vacant and contemptuous laugh was all his answer.

"But, Mr. Redlaw," said the student, "as a just man, and a good man, think how innocent I am, except in name and descent, of participation in any wrong inflicted on you, or in any sorrow you have borne."

"Sorrow!" said Redlaw, laughing. "Wrong! What are those to me?"

"For Heaven's sake," entreated the shrinking student, "do not let the mere interchange of a few words with me change you like this, sir! Let me pass again from your knowledge and notice. Let me occupy my old reserved and distant place among those whom you instruct. Know me only by the name I have assumed, and not by that of Longford—"

"Longford!" exclaimed the other.

He clasped his head with both his hands, and for a moment turned upon the young man his own intelligent and thoughtful face. But the light passed from it, like the sunbeam of an instant, and it clouded as before.

"The name my mother bears, sir," faltered the young man, "the name she took, when she might, perhaps, have taken one more honored. Mr. Redlaw," hesitatingly, "I believe I know that history. Where my information halts, my guesses at what is wanting may supply something not remote from the truth. I am the child of a marriage that has not proved itself a well-assorted or a happy one. From infancy, I have heard you spoken of with honor and respect—with something that was almost reverence. I have heard of such devotion, of such fortitude and tenderness, of such rising up against the obstacles which press men down, that my fancy, since I learnt my little lesson from my mother, has shed a lustre on your name. At last, a poor student myself, from whom could I learn but you?"

Redlaw, unmoved, unchanged, and looking at him with a staring frown, answered by no word or sign.

"I cannot say," pursued the other, "I should try in vain to say, how much it has impressed me, and affected me, to find the gracious traces of the past, in that certain power of winning gratitude and confidence which is associated among us students (among the humblest of us, most) with Mr. Redlaw's generous name. Our ages and positions are so different, sir, and I am so accustomed to regard you from a distance, that I wonder at my own presumption when I touch, however lightly, on that theme. But to one who—I may say, who felt no common interest in my mother once—it may be something to hear, now that is all past, with that indescribable feelings of affection I have, in my obscurity, regarded him; with what pain and reluctance I have kept aloof from his encouragement, when a word of it would have made me rich; yet how I have felt it fit that I should hold my course, content to know him, and to be unknown. Mr. Redlaw," said the student, faintly, "what I would have said, I have said ill, for my strength is strange to me as yet; but for anything unworthy in this fraud of mine, forgive me, and for all the rest forget me!"

The staring frown remained on Redlaw's face, and yielded to no other expression until the student, with these words, advanced towards him, as if to touch his hand, when he drew back and cried to him:

"Don't come nearer to me!"

The young man stopped, shocked by the eagerness of his recoil, and by the sternness of his repulsion; and he passed his hand, thoughtfully, across his forehead.

"The past is past," said the chemist. "It dies like the brutes. Who talks to me of its traces in my life? He raves or lies! What have I to do with your distempered dreams? If you want money, here it is. I came to offer it; and that is all I came for. There can be nothing else that brings me here," he muttered, holding his head again, with both his hands. "There can be nothing else, and yet—"

He had tossed his purse upon the table. As he fell into this dim cogitation with himself, the student took it up, and held it out to him.

"Take it back, sir," he said proudly, though not angrily. "I wish you could take from me, with it, the remembrance of your words and offer.

"You do?" he retorted with a wild light in his eyes. "You do?"

"I do!"

The chemist went close to him, for the first time, and took the purse, and turned him by the arm, and looked him in the face.

"There is sorrow and trouble in sickness, is there not?" he demanded, with a laugh.

The wondering student answered, "Yes."

"In its unrest, in its anxiety, in its suspense, in all its train of physical and mental miseries?" said the chemist, with a wild unearthly exultation. "All best forgotten, are they not?"

The student did not answer, but again passed his hand, confusedly, across his forehead. Redlaw still held him by the sleeve, when Milly's voice was heard outside.

"I can see very well now," she said, "thank you, Dolf. Don't cry, dear. Father and mother will be comfortable again, to-morrow, and home will be comfortable, too. A gentleman with him, is there!"

Redlaw released his hold, as he listened.

"I have feared, from the first moment," he murmured to himself, "to meet her. There is a steady quality of goodness in her, that I dread to influence. I may be the murderer of what is tenderest and best within her bosom."

She was knocking at the door.

"Shall I dismiss it as an idle foreboding, or still avoid her?" he muttered, looking uneasily around.

She was knocking at the door again.

"Of all the visitors who could come here," he said, in a hoarse, alarmed voice, turning to his companion, this is the one I should desire most to avoid. Hide me!"

The student opened a frail door in the wall, communicating where the garret roof began to slope towards the floor with a small inner room. Redlaw passed in hastily, and shut it after him.

The student then resumed his place upon the couch, and called to her to enter.

"Dear Mr. Edmund," said Milly, looking round, "they told me there was a gentleman here."

"There is no one here but I."

"There has been some one?"

"Yes, yes, there has been some one."

She put her little basket on the table, and went up to the back of the couch, as if to take the extended hand—but it was not there. A little surprised, in her quiet way, she leaned over to look at his face, and gently touched him on the brow.

"Are you quite as well to-night? Your head is not so cool as in the afternoon."

"Tut!' said the student, petulantly, "very little ails me."

A little more surprise, but no reproach, was expressed in her face, as she withdrew to the other side of the table, and took a small packet of needlework from her basket. But she laid it down again, on second thoughts, and going noiselessly about the room, set everything exactly in its place, and in the neatest order; even to the cushions on the couch, which she touched with so light a hand that he hardly seemed to know it, as he lay looking at the fire. When all this was done, and she had swept the hearth, she sat down, in her modest little bonnet, to her work, and was quietly busy on it directly.

"It's the new muslin curtain for the window, Mr. Edmund," said Milly, stitching away as she talked. "It will look very clean and nice, though it costs very little, and will save your eyes, too, from the light. My William says the room should not be too light just now, when you are recovering so well, or the glare might make you giddy."

He said nothing; but there was something so fretful and impatient in his change of position, that her quick fingers stopped, and she looked at him anxiously.

"The pillows are not comfortable," she said, laying down her work and rising. "I will soon put them right."

"They are very well," he answered. "Leave them alone, pray. You make so much of everything."

He raised his head to say this, and looked at her so thanklessly, that, after he had thrown himself down again, she stood timidly pausing. However, she resumed her seat, and her needle, without having directed even a murmuring look towards him, and was soon as busy as before.

"I have been thinking, Mr. Edmund, that you have been often thinking of late, when I have been sitting by, how true the saying is, that adversity is a good teacher.

Health will be more precious to you, after this illness, than it has ever been. And years hence, when this time of year comes round, and you remember the days when you lay here sick, alone, that the knowledge of your illness might not afflict those who are dearest to you, your home will be doubly dear, and doubly blest. Now, isn't that a good, true thing?"

She was too intent upon her work, and too earnest in what she said, and too composed and quiet altogether, to be on the watch for any look he might direct towards her in reply; so the shaft of his ungrateful glance fell harmless, and did not wound her.

"Ah!" said Milly, with her pretty head inclining thoughtfully on one side, as she looked down, following her busy fingers with her eyes. "Even on me—and I am very different from you, Mr. Edmund, for I have no learning, and don't know how to think properly—this view of such things has made a great impression, since you have been lying ill. When I have seen you so touched by the kindness and attention of the poor people down stairs, I have felt that you thought even that experience some repayment for the loss of health, and I have read in your face, as plain as if it was a book, that but for some trouble and sorrow we should never know half the good there is about us."

His getting up from the couch, interrupted her, or she was going on to say more.

"We needn't magnify the merit, Mrs. William," he rejoined slightingly. The people down stairs will be paid in good time I dare say, for any little extra service they may have rendered me; and perhaps they anticipate no less. I am much obliged to you, too."

Her fingers stopped, and she looked at him.

"I can't be made to feel the more obliged by your exaggerating the case," he said. "I am sensible that you have been interested in me, and I say I am much obliged to you. What more would you have?"

Her work fell on her lap, as she still looked at him walking to and fro with an intolerant air, and stopping now and then.

"I say again, I am much obliged to you. Why weaken my sense of what is your due in obligation, by preferring enormous claims upon me? Trouble, sorrow, affliction, adversity! One might suppose I had been dying a score of deaths here!"

"Do you believe, Mr. Edmund," she asked, rising and going nearer to him, "that I spoke of the poor people of the house, with any reference to myself? To me?" laying her hand upon her bosom with a simple and innocent smile of astonishment.

"Oh! I think nothing about it, my good creature," he returned. "I have had an indisposition, which your solicitude—observe! I say solicitude—makes a great deal more of than it merits; and it's over, and we can't perpetuate it."

He coldly took a book, and sat down at the table.

She watched him for a little whlie, until her smile was quite gone, and then returning to where her basket was, said gently:

"Mr. Edmund, would you rather be alone?"

"There is no reason why I should detain you here," he replied.

"Except—" said Milly, hesitating, and showing her work.

"Oh! the curtain," he answered, with a supercilious laugh. "That's not worth staying for."

She made up the little packet again, and put it in her basket. Then, standing before him with such an air of patient entreaty that he could not choose but look at her, she said:

"If you should want me, I will come back willingly. When you did want me, I was quite happy to come; there was no merit in it. I think you must be afraid, that, now you are getting well, I may be troublesome to you; but I should not have been, indeed. I should have come no longer than your weakness and confinement lasted. You owe me nothing; but it is right that you should deal as justly by me as if I was a lady—even the very lady that you love; and if you suspect me of meanly making much of the little I have tried to do to comfort your sick room, you do yourself more wrong than ever you can do me. That is why I am sorry. That is why I am very sorry."

If she had been as passionate as she was quiet, as indignant as she was calm, as angry in her look as she was gentle, as loud of tone as she was low and clear, she might have left no sense of her departure in the room, compared with that which fell upon the lonely student when she went away.

He was gazing drearily upon the place where she had been, when Redlaw came out of his concealment, and came to the door.

"When sickness lays its hand on you again," he said, looking fiercely back at him, "—may it be soon!—Die here! Rot here!"

"What have you done?" returned the other, catching at his cloak. "What change have you wrought in me? What curse have you brought upon me? Give me back myself!"

"Give me back myself!" exclaimed Redlaw, like a madman. "I am infected! I am infectious! I am charged with poison for my own mind, and the minds of all mankind. Where I felt interest, compassion, sympathy, I am turning into stone. Selfishness and ingratitude spring up in my blighted footsteps. I am only so much less base than the wretches whom I make so, that in the moment of their transformation I can hate them."

As he spoke—the young man still holding to his cloak—he cast him off, and struck him: then wildly hurried out into the night air where the wind was blowing, the snow falling, the cloud-drift sweeping on, the moon dimly shining, and where, blowing in the wind, falling with the snow, drifting with the clouds, shining in the moonlight, and heavily looming in the darkness, were the phantom's words, "The gift that I have given, you shall give again, go where you will!"

Whither he went, he neither knew nor cared, so that he avoided company. The change he felt within him made the busy streets a desert, and himself a desert, and the multitude around him, in their manifold endurances and ways of life, a mighty waste of sand, which the winds tossed into unintelligible heaps and made a ruinous confusion of. Those traces in his breast which the phantom had told him would "die out soon," were not, as yet, so far upon their way to death, but that he understood enough of what he was, and what he made of others, to desire to be alone.

This put it in his mind—he suddenly bethought himself, as he was going along, of the boy who had rushed into his room. And then he recollected, that of those with whom he had communicated since the phantom's disappearance, that boy alone had shown no sign of being changed.

Monstrous and odious as the wild thing was to him, he determined to seek it out, and prove if this were really so; and also to seek it with another intention, which came into his thoughts at the same time.

So, resolving with some difficulty where he was, he directed his steps back to the old college, and to that part of it where the general porch was, and where, alone, the pavement was worn by the tread of the students' feet.

The keeper's house stood just within the iron gates, forming a part of the chief quadrangle. There was a little cloister outside, and from that sheltered place he knew he could look in at the window of their ordinary room, and see who was within. The iron gates were shut, but his hand was familiar with the fastening, and drawing it back by thrusting in his wrist between the bars, he passed through softly, shut it again, and crept up to the window, crumbling the thin crust of snow with his feet.

The fire, to which he had directed the boy last night, shining brightly through the glass, made an illuminated place upon the ground. Instinctively avoiding this, and going round it, he looked in at the window. At first, he thought that there was no one there, and that the blaze was reddening only the old beams in the ceiling and the dark walls; but peering in more narrowly, he saw the object of his search coiled asleep before it on the floor. He passed quickly to the door, opened it, and went in.

The creature lay in such a fiery heat, that, as the chemist stooped to rouse him, it scorched his head. So soon as he was touched, the boy, not half awake, clutched his rags together with the instinct of flight upon him, half rolled and half ran into a distant corner of the room, where, heaped upon the ground, he struck his foot out to defend himself.

"Get up!" said the chemist. "You have not forgotten me!"

"You let me alone!" returned the boy. "This is the woman's house—not yours."

The chemist's steady eye controlled him somewhat, or inspired him with enough submission to be raised upon his feet, and looked at.

"Who washed them,and put those bandages where they were bruised and cracked?" asked the chemist, pointing to their altered state.

"The woman did."

"And is it she who has made you cleaner in the face, too?"

"Yes, the woman."

Redlaw asked these questions to attract his eyes towards himself, and with the same intent now held him by the chin, and threw his wild hair back, though he loathed to touch him. The boy watched his eyes keenly, as if he thought it needful to his own defence, not knowing what he might do next; and Redlaw could see well that no change came over him.

"Where are they?" he inquired.

"The woman's out."

"I know she is. Where is the old man with the white hair, and his son?"

"The woman's husband, d'ye mean?" inquired the boy.

"Ay. Where are those two?"

"Out. Something's the matter, somewhere. They were fetched out in a hurry and told me to stop here."

"Come with me," said the chemist, "and I'll give you money."

"Come where? and how much will you give?"

"I'll give you more shillings than you ever saw, and bring you back soon. Do you know your way to where you came from?"

"You let me go," returned the boy, suddenly twisting out of his grasp. "I'm not a-going to take you there. Let me be, or I'll heave some fire at you!"

He was down before it, and ready, with his savage little hand, to pluck the burning coals out.

What the chemist had felt, in observing the effect of his charmed influence stealing over those with whom he came in contact, was not nearly equal to the cold vague terror with which he saw this baby-monster put it at defiance. It chilled his blood to look on the immovable, impenetrable thing, in the likeness of a child, with its sharp, malignant face turned up to his, and its almost infant hand, ready at the bars.

"Listen, boy!" he said. "You shall take me where you please, so that you take me where the people are very miserable or very wicked. I want to do them good, and not to harm them. You shall have money, as I have told you, and I will bring you back. Get up! Come quickly!" He made a hasty step towards the door, afraid of her returning.

"Will you let me walk by myself, and never hold me, nor yet touch me?" said the boy, slowly withdrawing the hand with which he threatened, and beginning to get up.

"I will!"

"And let me go before, behind, or anyways I like?"

"I will!"

"Give me some money first then, and I'll go."

The chemist laid a few shillings, one by one, in his extended hand. To count them was beyond the boy's knowledge, but he said "one," every time, and avariciously looked at each as it was given, and at the donor. He had nowhere to put them, out of his hand, but in his mouth; and he put them there.

Redlaw then wrote with his pencil on a leaf of his pocket book, that the boy was with him; and laying it on the table, signed to him to follow. Keeping his rags together, as usual, the boy complied, and went out with his bare head and his naked feet into the winter night.

Preferring not to depart by the iron gate by which he had entered, where they were in danger of meeting her whom he so anxiously avoided, the chemist led the way, through some of those passages among which the boy had lost himself, and by that portion of the building where he lived, to a small door of which he had the key. When they got into the street, he stopped to ask his guide—who instantly retreated from him—if he knew where they were.

The savage thing looked here and there, and at length, nodding his head, pointed in the direction he designed to take. Redlaw going on at once, he followed, somewhat less suspiciously; shifting his money from his mouth into his hand, and back again into his mouth, and stealthily rubbing it bright upon his shreds of clothes, as he went along.

Three times, in their progress, they were side by side. Three times they stopped, being side by side. Three times the chemist glanced down at his face, and shuddered as it forced upon him one reflection.

The first occasion was when they were crossing an old churchyard, and Redlaw stopped among the graves, utterly at a loss how to connect them with any tender, softening, or consolatory thought.

The second was, when the breaking forth of the moon induced him to look up at the heavens, where he saw her in her glory, surrounded by a host of stars he still knew by the names and histories which human science has appended to them; but where he saw nothing else he had been wont to see, felt nothing he had been wont to feel, in looking up there, on a bright night.

The third was when he stopped to listen to a plaintive strain of music, but could only hear a tune, made manifest to him by the dry mechanism of the instruments and his own ears, with no address to any mystery within him, without a whisper in it of the past, or of the future, powerless upon him as the sound of last year's running water, or the rushing of last year's wind.

At each of these three times, he saw with horror that, in spite of the vast intellectual distance between them, and their being unlike each other in all physical respects, the expression on the boy's face was the expression on his own.

They journeyed on for some time—now through such crowded places, that he often looked over his shoulder thinking he had lost his guide, but generally finding him within his shadow on his other side; now by ways so quiet that he could have counted his short, quick, naked footsteps coming on behind—until they arrived at a ruinous collection of houses, and the boy touched him and stopped.

"In there!" he said, pointing out one house where there were scattered lights in the windows, and a dim lantern in the doorway, with "Lodgings for Travelers" painted on it.

Redlaw looked about him; from the houses, to the waste piece of ground on which the houses stood, or rather did not altogether tumble down, unfenced, undrained, unlighted, and bordered by a sluggish ditch; from that, to the sloping line of arches, part of some neighboring viaduct or bridge with which it was surrounded, and which lessened gradually towards them, until the last but one was a mere kennel for a dog, the last a plundered little heap of bricks; from that, to the child close to him, cowering and trembling with the cold, and limping on one little foot, while he coiled the other round his leg to warm it, yet staring at all these things with that frightful likeness of expression so apparent in his face, that Redlaw started from him.

"In there!" said the boy, pointing out the house again. "I'll wait."

"Will they let me in?" asked Redlaw.

"Say you're a doctor," he answered with a nod. "There's plenty ill here."

Looking back on his way to the house-door, Redlaw saw him trail himself upon the dust and crawl within the shelter of the smallest arch, as if he were a rat. He had no pity for the thing, but he was afraid of it; and when it looked out of its den at him, he hurried to the house as a retreat.

"Sorrow, wrong, and trouble," said the chemist, with a painful effort at some more distant remembrance, "at least haunt this place, darkly. He can do no harm, who brings forgetfulness of such things here!"

With these words, he pushed the yielding door, and went in.

There was a woman sitting on the stairs, either asleep or forlorn, whose head was bent down on her hands and knees. As it was not easy to pass without treading on her, and as she was perfectly regardless of his near approach, he stopped, and touched her on the shoulder. Looking up, she showed him quite a young face, but one whose bloom and promise were all swept away, as if the haggard winter should unnaturally kill the spring.

With little or no show of concern on his account, she moved nearer to the wall to leave him a wider passage.

"What are you?" said Redlaw, pausing, with his hand upon the broken stair-rail.

"What do you think I am?" she answered, showing him her face again.

He looked upon the ruined Temple of God, so lately made, so soon disfigured; and something, which was not compassion—for the springs in which a true compassion for such miseries has its rise, were dried up in his breast—but which was nearer to it, for the moment, than any feeling that had lately struggled into the darkening, but not yet wholly darkened, night of his mind—mingled a touch of softness with his next words.

"I am come here to give relief, if I can," he said. "Are you thinking of any wrong?"

She frowned at him, and then laughed; and then her laugh prolonged itself into a shivering sigh, as she dropped her head again, and hid her fingers in her hair.

"Are you thinking of a wrong?" he asked once more.

"I am thinking of my life," she said with a momentary look at him.

He had a perception that she was one of many, and that he saw the type of thousands, when he saw her, drooping at his feet.

"What are your parents?" he demanded.

"I had a good home once. My father was a gardener, far away in the country."

"Is he dead?"

"He's dead to me. All such things are dead to me. You a gentleman, and not know that!" She raised her eyes again, and laughed at him.

"Girl!" said Redlaw, sternly, "before this death, of all such things, was brought about, was there no wrong done to you? In spite of all that you can do, does no remembrance of wrong cleave to you? Are there not times upon times when it is misery to you?"

So little of what was womanly was left in her appearance, that now, when she burst into tears, he stood amazed. But he was more amazed, and much disquieted, to note that in her awakened recollection of this wrong, the first trace of her old humanity and frozen tenderness appeared to show itself.

He drew a little off, and in doing so, observed that her arms were black, her face cut, and her bosom bruised.

"What brutal hand has hurt you so?" he asked.

"My own. I did it myself!" she answered quickly.

"It is impossible.

"I'll swear I did! He didn't touch me. I did it t myself in a passion, and threw myself down here. He wasn't near me. He never laid a hand upon me!"

In the white determination of her face, confronting him with this untruth, he saw enough of the last perversion and distortion of good surviving in that miserable breast, to be stricken with remorse that he had ever come near her.

"Sorrow, wrong, and trouble!" he muttered, turning his fearful gaze away. "All that connects her with the state from which she has fallen, has those roots! In the name of God, let me go by!"

Afraid to look at her again, afraid to touch her, afraid to think of having sundered the last thread by which she held upon the mercy of Heaven, he gathered his cloak about him, and glided swiftly up the stairs.

Opposite to him, on the landing, was a door, which stood partly open, and which, as he ascended, a man with a candle in his hand, came forward from within to shut. But this man, on seeing him, drew back, with much emotion in his manner, and, as if by a sudden impulse, mentioned his name aloud.

In the surprise of such a recognition there, he stopped, endeavoring to recollect the wan and startled face. He had no time to consider it, for, to his yet greater amazement, old Philip came out of the room, and took him by the hand.

"Mr. Redlaw," said the old man, "this is like you, this is like you, sir! you have heard of it, and have come after us to render any help you can. Ah, too late, too late!"

Redlaw, with a bewildered look, submitted to be led into the room. A man lay there on a truckle-bed, and William Swidger stood at the bedside.

"Too late!" murmured the old man, looking wistfully into the chemist's face; and the tears stole down his cheeks.

"That's what I say, father," interposed his son in a low voice. "That's where it is, exactly. To keep as quiet as ever we can while he's a-dozing, is the only thing to do. You're right, father!"

Redlaw paused at the bedside, and looked down on the figure that was stretched upon the mattress. It was that of a man, who should have been in the vigor of his life, but on whom it was not likely the sun would ever shine again. The vices of his forty or fifty years' career had so branded him, that, in comparison with their effects upon his face, the heavy hand of time upon the old man's face who watched him had been merciful and beautifying.

"Who is this?" asked the chemist, looking round.

"My son George, Mr. Redlaw," said the old man, wringing his hands. "My eldest son, George, who was more his mother's pride than all the rest!"

Redlaw's eyes wandered from the old man's gray head, as he laid it down upon the bed, to the person who had recognized him, and who had kept aloof, in the remotest corner of the room. He seemed to be about his own age; and although he knew no such hopeless decay and broken man as he appeared to be, there was something in the turn of his figure, as he stood with his back towards him, and now went out at the door, that made him pass his hand uneasily across his brow.

"William," he said in a gloomy whisper, "who is that man?"

"Why, you see, sir," returned Mr. William, "that's what I say, myself. Why should a man ever go and gamble, and the like of that, and let himself down inch by inch till he can't let himself down any lower!"

"Has he done so?" asked Redlaw, glancing after him with the same uneasy action as before.

"Just exactly that, sir," returned William Swidger, "as I'm told. He knows a little about medicine, sir, it seems; and having been wayfaring towards London with my unhappy brother that you see here, Mr. William passed his coat-sleeve across his eyes—"and being lodging up stairs for the night—what I say, you see, is that strange companions come together here sometimes—he looked in to attend upon him, and came for us at his request. What a mournful spectacle, sir! But that's where it is. It's enough to kill my father!"

Redlaw looked up, at these words, and, recalling where he was, and with whom, and the spell he carried with him—which his surprise had obscured—retired a little, hurriedly, debating with himself whether to shun the house that moment, or remain.

Yielding to a certain sullen doggedness, which it seemed to be a part of his condition to struggle with, he argued for remaining.

"Was it only yesterday," he said, "when I observed the memory of this old man to be a tissue of sorrow and trouble, and shall I be afraid, to-night to shake it? Are such remembrances as I can drive away, so precious to this dying man that I need fear for him? No? I'll stay here."

But he stayed, in fear and trembling none the less for these words; and, shrouded in his black cloak with his face turned from them, stood away from the bedside listening to what they said, as if he felt himself a demon in the place.

"Father!" murmured the sick man, rallying a little from his stupor.

"My boy! My son George!" said old Philip.

"You spoke, just now, of my being mother's favorite, long ago. It's a dreadful thing to think now, of long ago!"

"No, no, no;" returned the old man. "Think of it. Don't say it's dreadful. It's not dreadful to me, my son."

"It cuts you to the heart, father." For the old man's tears were falling on him.

"Yes, yes," said Philip, "so it does; but it does me good. It's a heavy sorrow to think of that time, but it does me good, George. Oh, think of it, too, think of it, too, and your heart will be softened more and more! Where's my son William? William, my boy, your mother loved him dearly to the last, and with her latest breath said, 'Tell him I forgave him, blessed him, and prayed for him.' Those were her words to me. I have never forgotten them, and I'm eighty-seven!"

"Father!" said the man upon the bed, "I am dying, I know. I am so far gone, that I can hardly speak, even of what my mind most runs on. Is there any hope for me beyond this bed?"

"There is hope," returned the old man, "for all who are softened and penitent. There is hope for all such. Oh!" he exclaimed, clasping his hands and looking up, "I was thankful, only yesterday, that I could remember this unhappy son when he was an innocent child. But what a comfort it is, now, to think that even God himself has that remembrance of him!"

Redlaw spread his hands upon his face, and shrunk like a murderer.

"Ah!" feebly moaned the man upon the bed. "The waste since then, the waste of life since then!"

"But he was a child once," said the old man. "He played with children. Before he lay down on his bed at night, and fell into his guiltless rest, he said his prayers at his poor mother's knee. I have seen him do it, many a time; and seen her lay his head upon her breast, and kiss him. Sorrowful as it was to her, and to me, to think of this when he went so wrong, and when our hopes and plans for him were all broken, this gave him still a hold upon us, that nothing else could have given. Oh, Father, so much better than the fathers upon earth! Oh, Father, so much more afflicted by the errors of thy children! take this wanderer back! Not as he is, but as he was then, let him cry to Thee, as he has so often seemed to cry to us!"

As the old man lifted up his trembling hands, the son, for whom he made the supplication, laid his sinking head against him for support and comfort, as if he were indeed the child of whom he spoke.

When did man ever tremble, as Redlaw trembled, in the silence that ensued! He knew that it must come upon them, knew that it was coming fast.

"My time is very short, my breath is shorter," said the sick man, supporting himself on one arm, and with the other groping in the air, "and I remember there is something on my mind concerning the man who was here just now. Father and William—wait!—is there really anything in black, out there?"

"Yes, yes, it is real," said his aged father.

"Is it a man?"

"What I say myself, George," interposed his brother, bending kindly over him. "It's Mr. Redlaw."

"I thought I had dreamed of him. Ask him to come here."

The chemist, whiter than the dying man, appeared before him. Obedient to the motion of his hand, he sat upon the bed.

"It has been so ripped up, to-night, sir," said the sick man, laying his hand upon his heart, with a look in which the mute, imploring agony of his condition was concentrated, "by the sight of my poor old father, and the thought of all the trouble I have been the cause of, and all the wrong and sorrow lying at my door, that——"

Was it the extremity to which he had come, or was it the dawning of another change, that made him stop?

"That what I can do right, with my mind running on so much, so fast, I'll try to do. There was another man here. Did you see him?"

Redlaw could not reply by any word; for when he saw that fatal sign he knew so well now, of the wandering hand upon the forehead, his voice died at his lips. But he made some indication of assent.

"He is penniless, hungry, and destitute. He is completely beaten down, and has no resource at all. Look after him! Lose no time! I know he has it in his mind to kill himself."

It was working. It was on his face. His face was changing, hardening, deepening in all its shades, and losing all its sorrow.

"Don't you remember? Don't you know him?" he pursued.

He shut his face out for a moment, with the hand that again wandered over his forehead, and then it lowered on Redlaw, reckless, ruffianly, and callous.

"Why, d—n you!" he said, scowling round, "what have you been doing to me here! I have lived bold, and I mean to die bold. To the devil with you!"

And so lay down upon his bed, and put his arms up, over his head and ears, as resolute from that time to keep out all access, and to die in his indifference.

If Redlaw had been struck by lightning, it could not have struck him from the bedside with a more tremendous shock. But the old man, who had left the bed while his son was speaking to him, now returning, avoided it quickly likewise, and with abhorrence.

"Where's my boy William?" said the old man hurriedly. "William, come away from here. We'll go home."

"Home, father!" returned William. "Are you going to leave your own son?"

"Where's my own son?" replied the old man.

"Where? why there!"

"That's no son of mine," said Philip, trembling with resentment. "No such wretch as that has any claim on me. My children are pleasant to look at, and they wait upon me, and get my meat and drink ready, and are useful to me. I've a right to it! I'm eighty-seven!"

"You're old enough to be no older," muttered William, looking at him grudgingly, with his hands in his pockets. "I don't know what good you are, myself. We could have a deal more pleasure without you."

"My son, Mr. Redlaw!" said the old man. "My son, too! The boy talking to me of my son! Why, what he has ever done to give me any pleasure, I should like to know?"

"I don't know what you have ever done to give me any pleasure," said William, sulkily.

"Let me think," said the old man. "For how many Christmas times running, have I sat in my warm place, and never had to come out in the cold night air; and have made good cheer, without being disturbed by any such uncomfortable, wretched sight as him there? It is twenty, William?"

"Nigher forty, it seems," he muttered. "Why, when I look at my father, sir, and come too think of it," addressing Redlaw, with an impatience and irritation that were quite new, "I'm whipped if I can see anything in him but a calendar of ever so many years of eating and drinking, and making himself comfortable, over and over again."

"I—I'm eighty-seven," said the old man, rambling on childishly and weakly, "and I don't know as I ever was much put out by anything. I'm not going to begin now, because of what he calls my son. He's not my son. I've had a power of pleasant times. I recollect once—no I don't—no, it's broken off. It was something about a game of cricket and a friend of mine, but it's somehow broken off. I wonder who he was—I suppose I liked him? And I wonder what became of him—I suppose he died? But I don't know. And I don't care, neither; I don't care a bit."

In his drowsy chuckling, and the shaking of his head, he put his hands into his waistcoat-pockets. In one of them he found a bit of holly (left there, probably last night), which he now took out, and looked at.

"Berries, eh?" said the old man. "Ah! It's a pity they're not good to eat. I recollect when I was a little chap about as high as that, and out a-walking with—let me see—who was I out a-walking with?—no, I don't remember how that was. I don't remember as I ever walked with any one particular, or cared for any one, or any one for me. Berries, eh? There's good cheer when there's berries. Well; I ought to have my share of it, and to be waited on, and kept warm and comfortable;

for I'm eighty-seven, and a poor old man. I'm eigh-ty-seven. Eigh-ty-seven!'"

The drivelling, pitiable manner in which, as he repeated this, he nibbled at the leaves, and spat the morsels out; the cold, uninterested eye with which his youngest son (so changed) regarded him; the determined apathy with which his eldest son lay hardened in his sin—impressed themselves no more on Redlaw's observation; for he broke his way from the spot to which his feet seemed to have been fixed, and ran out of the house.

His guide came crawling forth from his place of refuge, and was ready for him before he reached the arches.

"Back to the woman's?" he inquired.

"Back, quickly!" answered Redlaw. "Stop nowhere on the way."

For a short distance the boy went on before; but their return was more like a flight than a walk, and it was as much as his bare feet could do, to keep pace with the chemist's rapid strides. Shrinking from all who passed, shrouded in his cloak and keeping it drawn closely about him, as though there were mortal contagion in any fluttering touch of his garments, he made no pause until they reached the door by which they had come out. He unlocked it with his key, went in, accompanied by the boy, and hastened through the dark passages to his chamber.

The boy watched as he made the door fast, and withdrew behind the table, when he looked round.

"Come!" he said. "Don't you touch me! You've not brought me here to take my money away."

Redlaw threw some more upon the ground. He flung his body on it immediately, as if to hide it from him, lest the sight of it should tempt him to reclaim it; and not until he saw him seated by his lamp, with his face hidden in his hands, began furtively to pick it up. When he had done so, he crept near the fire, and sitting down in a great chair before it, took from his breast some broken scraps of food, and fell to munching, and to staring at the blaze, and now and then to glancing at his shillings, which he kept clenched up in a bunch, in one hand.

"And this," said Redlaw, gazing on him with increased repugnance and fear, "is the only one companion I have left on earth."

How long it was before he was aroused from his contemplation of this creature, whom he dreaded so—whether half an hour, or half the night—he knew not. But the stillness of the room was broken by the boy (whom he had seen listening) starting up, and running toward the door.

"Here's the woman coming!" he exclaimed.

The chemist stopped him on his way, at the moment she knocked.

"Let me go to her, will you?" said the boy.

"Not now," returned the chemist. "Stay here. Nobody must pass in or out of the room now. Who's that?"

"It's I, sir," cried Milly. "Pray, sir, let me in!"

"No! not for the world!" he said.

"Mr. Redlaw, Mr. Redlaw, pray, sir, let me in."

"What is the matter?" he said, holding the boy.

"The miserable man you saw is worse, and nothing I can say will wake him from his terrible infatuation. William's father has turned childish in a moment. William himself has changed. The shock has been too sudden for him; I cannot understand him; he is not like himself. Oh, Mr. Redlaw, pray advise me, help me!"

"No! No! No!" he answered.

"Mr. Redlaw! Dear sir! George has been muttering, in his doze, about the man you saw there, who, he fears, will kill himself."

"Better he should do it, than come near me!"

"He says, in his wanderings, that you know him; that he was your friend once, long ago; that he is the ruined father of a student here—my mind misgives me, of the young gentleman who has been ill. What is to be done? How is he to be followed? How is he to be saved? Mr. Redlaw, pray, oh, pray, advise me! Help me!"

All this time he held the boy, who was half-mad to pass him, and let her in.

"Phantoms! Punishers of impious thoughts!" cried Redlaw, gazing round in anguish, "Look upon me! From the darkness of my mind, let the glimmering of contrition that I know is there, shine up, and show my misery! In the material world, as I have long taught, nothing can be spared; no step or atom in the wondrous structure could be lost, without a blank being made in the great universe. I know, now, that it is the same with good and evil, happiness and sorrow, in the memories of men. Pity me! Relieve me!"

There was no response, but her "Help me, help me, let me in!" and the boy's struggling to get to her.

"Shadow of myself! Spirit of my darker hours!" cried Redlaw in distraction, "Come back and haunt me day and night, but take this gift away! Or, if it must still rest with me deprive me of the dreadful power of giving it to others. Undo what I have done. Leave me benighted, but restore the day to those whom I have cursed. As I have spared this woman from the first, and as I never will go forth again, but will die here with no hand to tend me, save this creature's who is proof against me, —hear me!"

The only reply still was, the boy struggling to get to her, while he held him back; and the cry, increasing in its energy, "Help! let me in. He was your friend once, how shall he be followed, how shall he be saved? They are all changed, there is no one else to help me; pray, pray, let me in!"

CHAPTER III.

THE GIFT REVERSED.

Night was still heavy in the sky. On open plains, from hill-tops, and from the decks of solitary ships at sea, a distant low-lying line, that promised by and by to change to light, was visible in the dim horizon; but its promise was remote and doubtful, and the moon was striving with the night-clouds busily.

The shadows upon Redlaw's mind succeeded thick and fast to one another, and obscured its light as the night-clouds hovered between the moon and earth, and kept the latter veiled in darkness. Fitful and uncertain as the shadows which the night-clouds cast, were their concealments from him, and imperfect revelations to him; and, like the night-clouds still, if the clear light broke forth for a moment, it was only that they might sweep over it, and make the darkness deeper than before.

Without, there was a profound and solemn hush upon the ancient pile of buildings, and its buttresses and angles made dark shapes of mystery upon the ground, which now seemed to retire into the smooth white snow and now seemed to come out of it, as the moon's path was more or less beset. Within, the chemist's room was indistinct and murky, by the light of the expiring lamp; a ghostly silence had succeeded to the knocking and the voice outside; nothing was audible but, now and then, a low sound among the whitened ashes of the fire, as of its yielding up its last breath. Before it on the ground the boy lay fast asleep. In his chair, the chemist sat, as he sat there since the calling at his door had ceased—like a man turned to stone.

At such a time, the Christmas music he had heard before began to play. He listened to it at first, as he had listened in the churchyard; but presently—it playing still, and being borne toward him on the night-air, in a low, sweet, melancholy strain—he rose, and stood stretching his hands about him, as if there were some friend approaching within his reach, on whom his desolate touch might rest, yet do no harm. As he did this, his face became less fixed and wondering; a gentle trembling came upon him; and at last his eyes filled with tears, and he put his hands before them, and bowed down his head.

His memory of sorrow, wrong, and trouble, had not come back to him; he knew that it was not restored; he had no passing belief or hope that it was. But some dumb stir within him made him capable, again, of being moved by what was hidden, afar off, in the music. If it were only that it told him sorrowfully the value of what he had lost, he thanked Heaven for it with a fervent gratitude.

As the last chord died upon his ears, he raised his head to listen to its lingering vibration. Beyond the boy, so that his sleeping figure lay at its feet, the phantom stood, immovable and silent, with his eyes upon him.

Ghastly it was, as it had ever been, but not so cruel and relentless in its aspect—or he thought or hoped so, as he looked upon it, trembling. It was not alone, but in its shadowy hand it held another hand.

And whose was that? Was the form that stood beside it indeed Milly's, or but her shade and picture? The quiet head was bent a little, as her manner was, and her eyes were looking down, as if in pity, on the sleeping child. A radiant light fell on her face, but did not touch the phantom; for, though close beside her, it was dark and colorless as ever.

"Specter!" said the chemist, troubled as he looked, "I have not been stubborn or presumptuous in respect to her. Oh, do not bring her here. Spare me that!"

"This is but a shadow," said the phantom; "when the morning shines, seek out the reality whose image I present before you."

"It is my inexorable doom to do so?" cried the chemist.

"It is," replied the phantom.

"To destroy her peace, her goodness; to make her what I am myself, and what I have made of others!"

"I have said, 'seek her out,'" returned the phantom. "I have said no more."

"Oh, tell me," exclaimed Redlaw, catching at the hope which he fancied might lie hidden in the words. "Can I undo what I have done?"

"No," returned the phantom.

"I do not ask for restoration to myself," said Redlaw. "What I abandoned, I abandoned of my own will, and have justly lost. But for those to whom I have transferred the fatal gift; who never sought it; who unknowingly received a curse of which they had no warning, and which they had no power to shun; can I do nothing?"

"Nothing," said the phantom.

"If I cannot, can any one?"

The phantom, standing like a statue, kept his gaze upon him for a while, then turned its head suddenly, and looked upon the shadow at its side.

"Ah! Can she?" cried Redlaw, still looking upon the shade.

The phantom released the hand it had retained till now, and softly raised its own with a gesture of dismissal. Upon that, her shadow, still preserving the same attitude, began to move or melt away.

"Stay," cried Redlaw, with an earnestness to which he could not give enough expression. "For a moment! As an act of mercy! I know that some change fell upon me, when those sounds were in the air just now. Tell me have I lost the power of harming her? May I go near her without dread? Oh, let her give me any sign of hope!"

The phantom looked upon the shade as he did—not at him—and gave no answer.

"At least, say this—has she, henceforth, the consciousness of any power to set right what I have done?"

"She has not," the phantom answered.

"Has she the power bestowed on her without the consciousness?"

The phantom answered: "Seek her out." And her shadow slowly vanished.

They were face to face again, and looking on each other, as intently and awfully as at the time of the bestowal of the gift, across the boy who still lay on the ground between them, at the phantom's feet.

"Terrible instructor," said the chemist, sinking on his knee before it, in an attitude of supplication, "by whom I was renounced, but by whom I am revisited (in which, and in whose milder aspect, I would fain believe I have a gleam of hope), I will obey without inquiry, praying that the cry I have sent up in the anguish of my soul has been, or will be, heard in behalf of those whom I have injured beyond human reparation. But there is one thing——"

"You speak to me of what is lying here," the phantom interposed, and pointed with its finger to the boy.

"I do," returned the chemist. "You know what I would ask. Why has this child alone been proof against my influence, and why, why, have I detected in its thoughts a terrible companionship with mine?"

"This," said the phantom, pointing to the boy, "is the last, completest illustration of a human creature, utterly bereft of such remembrances as you have yielded up. No softening memory of sorrow, wrong, or trouble enters here, because this wretched mortal from his birth has been abandoned to a worse condition than the beasts, and has, within his knowledge, no one contrast, no humanizing touch, to make a grain of such a memory spring up in his hardened breast. All within this desolate creature is barrren wilderness. All within the man bereft of what you have resigned, is the same barren wilderness. Woe to such a man! Woe, tenfold, to the nation that shall count its monsters such as this, lying here, by hundreds, and by thousands!"

Redlaw shrunk, appalled, from what he heard

"There is not," said the phantom, "one of these—not one—but shows a harvest that mankind must reap. From every seed of evil in this boy, a field of ruin is grown that shall be gathered in, and garnered up, and sown again in many places in the world, until regions are overspread with wickedness enough to raise the waters of another deluge. Open and unpunished murder in the city's streets would be less guilty in its daily toleration, than one such spectacle as this."

It seemed to look down upon the boy in his sleep. Redlaw, too, looked down upon him with a new emotion.

"There is not a father," said the phantom, "by whose side in his daily or his nightly walk, these creatures pass; there is not a mother among all the ranks of loving mothers in this land; there is no one risen from the state of childhood, but shall be responsible in his or her degree for this enormity. There is not a country throughout the earth on which it would not bring a curse. There is no religion upon earth that it would not deny; there is no people upon earth it would not put to shame."

The chemist clasped his hands, and looked, with trembling fear and pity, from the sleeping boy to the phantom, standing above him with its finger pointing down.

"Behold, I say," pursued the specter, "the perfect type of what it was your choice to be. Your influence is powerless here, because from this child's bosom you can banish nothing. His thoughts have been in 'terrible companionship' with yours, because you have gone down to his unnatural level. He is the growth of man's indifference; you are the growth of man's presumption. The beneficent design of Heaven is, in each case, overthrown, and from the two poles of the immaterial world you come together."

The chemist stooped upon the ground beside the boy, and, with the same kind of compassion for him that he now felt for himself, covered him as he slept, and no longer shrunk from him with abhorrence and indifference.

Soon, now, the distant line on the horizon brightened, the darkness faded, the sun rose red and glorious, and the chimney stacks and gables of the ancient building gleamed in clear air, which turned the smoke and vapor of the city into a cloud of gold. The very sun-dial in his shady corner, where the wind was used to spin with such unwindy constancy, shook off the finer particles of snow that had accumulated on his dull old face in the night, and looked out at the little white wreaths eddying round and round him. Doubtless some blind groping of the morning made its way down into the forgotten crypt so cold and earthy, where the Norman arches were half buried in the ground, and stirred the dull deep sap in the lazy vegetation hanging to the walls, and quickened the slow principle of life within the little world of wonderful and delicate creation which existed there with some faint knowledge that the sun was up.

The Tetterbys were up, and doing. Mr. Tetterby took down the shutters of the shop, and, strip by strip, revealed the treasures of the window to the eyes, so proof against their seductions, of Jerusalem Buildings. Adolphus had been out so long already, that he was halfway on to the Morning Pepper. Five small Tetterbys, whose ten round eyes were much inflamed by soap and friction, were in the tortures of a cool wash in the back kitchen, Mrs. Tetterby presiding. Johnny, who was pushed and hustled through his toilet with great rapidity when Moloch chanced to be in an exacting frame of mind (which was always the case), staggered up and down with his charge before the shop door, under greater difficulties than usual; the weight of Moloch being much increased by a complication of defences against the cold, composed of knitted worsted-work, and forming a complete suit of chain-armor, with a head-piece and blue-gaiters.

It was a peculiarity of this baby to be always cutting teeth. Whether they never came,or whether they came and went away again, is not in evidence; but it had certainly cut enough, on the showing of Mrs. Tetterby, to make a handsome dental provision for the sign of the bull and mouth. All sorts of objects were impressed for the rubbing of its gums, notwithstanding that it always carried, dangling at its waist (which was immediately under its chin, a bone ring, large enough to have represented the rosary of a young nun. Knife-handles, umbrella-tops, the heads of walking-sticks selected from the stock, the fingers of the family in general, but especially of Johnny, nutmeg-graters, crusts, the handles of doors, and the cool knobs on the tops of pokers, were among the commonest instrument indiscriminately applied for this baby's relief. The amount of electricity that must have been rubbed out of it in a week, is not to be calculated. Still Mrs. Tetterby always said, "it was coming through, and then the child would be herself;" and still it never did come through, and the child continued to be somebody else.

The tempers of the little Tetterbys had sadly changed with a few hours. Mr. and Mrs. Tetterby themselves were not more altered than their offspring. Usually they were an unselfish, good-natured, yielding little race, sharing short-commons when it happened (which was pretty often) contentedly and even generously, and taking a great deal of enjoyment out of a very little meat. But they were fighting now, not only for the soap and water, but even for the breakfast which was yet in perspective. The hand of every little Tetterby was against the other little Tetterbys; and even Johnny's hand—the patient, much-enduring, and devoted Johnny—rose against the baby! Yes, Mrs. Tetterby, going to the door by a mere accident, saw him viciously pick out a weak place in the suit of armor where a slap would tell, and slap that blessed child.

Mrs. Tetterby led him into the parlor by the collar, in that same flash of time, and repaid him the assault with usury thereto.

"You brute, you murdering little boy," said Mrs. Tetterby. "Had you the heart to do it?"

"Why don't your teeth come through, then," retorted Johnny, in a loud, rebellious voice, "instead of bothering me? How would you like it yourself?"

"Like it, sir!" said Mrs. Tetterby, relieving him of his dishonored load.

"Yes, like it," said Johnny. "How would you? Not at all. If you was me, you'd go for a soldier. I will, too. There ain't no babies in the army."

Mr. Tetterby, who had arrived upon the scene of action, rubbed his chin thoughtfully, instead of correcting the rebel, and seemed rather struck by this view of a military life.

"I wish I was in the army myself, if the child's in the right," said Mrs. Tetterby, looking at her husband, "for I have no peace of my life here. I'm a slave—a Virginia slave;" some indistinct association with their weak descent on the tobacco trade perhaps suggested this aggravated expression to Mrs. Tetterby. "I never have a holiday, or any pleasure at all, from year's end to year's end! Why, Lord bless and save the child," said Mrs. Tetterby, shaking the baby with an irritability hardly suited to so pious an aspiration, "what's the matter with her now?"

Not being able to discover, and not rendering the subject much clearer by shaking it, Mrs. Tetterby put the baby away in a cradle, and, folding her arms, sat rocking it angrily with her foot.

"How you stand there, 'Dolphus," said Mrs. Tetterby to her husband. "Why don't you do something?"

"Because I don't care about doing anything," Mr. Tetterby replied.

"I am sure I don't," said Mrs. Tetterby.

"I'll take my oath I don't," said Mr. Tetterby.

A diversion arose here among Johnny and his five younger brothers, who, in preparing the family breakfast table, had fallen to skirmishing for the temporary possession of the loaf, and were buffeting one another with great heartiness; the smallest boy of all, with precocious discretion, hovering outside the knot of combatants, and harrassing their legs. Into the midst of this fray, Mr. and Mrs. Tetterby both precipitated themselves with great ardor, as if such ground were the only ground on which they could now agree; and having, with no visible remains of their late soft-heartedness, laid about them without any lenity, and done much execution, resumed their former relative positions.

"You had better read your paper than do nothing at all," said Mrs. Tetterby.

"What's there to read in a paper?" returned Mr. Tetterby, with excessive discontent.

"What?" said Mrs. Tetterby. "Police."

"It's nothing to me," said Tetterby. "What do I care what people do, or are done to."

"Suicides," suggested Mrs. Tetterby.

"No business of mine," replied her husband.

"Births, deaths, and marriages, are those nothing to you?" said Mrs. Tetterby.

"If the births were all over for good, and all to-day; and the deaths were all to begin to come off to-morrow;

I don't see why it should interest me, till I thought it was a-coming to my turn," grumbled Tetterby. "As to marriages, I've done it myself. I know quite enough about them."

To judge from the dissatisfied expression of her face and manner, Mrs. Tetterby appeared to entertain the same opinions as her husband; but she opposed him, nevertheless, for the gratification of quarrelling with him.

"Oh, you're a consistent man," said Mrs. Tetterby, "ain't you? You, with the screen of your own making there, made of nothing else but bits of newspapers, which you sit and read to the children by the half-hour together!"

"Say used to, if you please," returned her husband. "You won't find me doing so any more. I'm wiser, now."

"Bah! wiser, indeed!" said Mrs. Tetterby. "Are you better?"

The question sounded some discordant note in Mr. Tetterby's breast. He ruminated dejectedly, and passed his hand across and across his forehead.

"Better!" murmured Mr. Tetterby. "I don't know as any of us are better, or happier either. Better, is it?"

He turned to the screen, and traced about it with his finger, until he found a certain paragraph of which he was in quest.

"This used to be one of the family favorites, I recollect," said Tetterby, in a forlorn and stupid way, "and used to draw tears from the children, and make 'em good, if there was any little bickering or discontent among 'em, next to the story of the robin redbreasts in the wood. 'Melancholy case of destitution. Yesterday a small man, with a baby in his arms, and surrounded by half-a-dozen ragged little ones, of various ages between ten and two, the whole of whom were evidently in a famishing condition, appeared before the worthy magistrate, and made the following recital:'—Ha! I don't understand it, I'm sure," said Tetterby; "I don't see what it has got to do with us."

"How old and shabby he looks," said Mrs. Tetterby, watching him. "I never saw such a change in a man. Ah! dear me, dear me, dear me, it was a sacrifice!"

"What was a sacrifice?" her husband sourly inquired.

Mrs. Tetterby shook her head; and without replying in words, raised a complete sea-storm about the baby, by her violent agitation of the cradle.

"If you mean your marriage was a sacrifice, my good woman——" said her husband.

"I do mean it," said his wife.

"Why, then I mean to say," pursued Mr. Tetterby, as sulkily and surlily as she, "that there are two sides to that affair; and that I was the sacrifice; and that I wish the sacrifice hadn't been accepted."

"I wish it hadn't, Tetterby, with all my heart and soul, I do assure you," said his wife. "You can't wish it more than I do, Tetterby."

"I don't know what I saw in her," muttered the newsman, "I'm sure; certainly, if I saw anything, it's not there now. I was thinking so, last night, after supper, by the fire. She's fat, she's ageing, she won't bear comparison with most other women."

"He's common-looking, he has no air with him, he's small, he's beginning to stoop, and he's getting bald," muttered Mrs. Tetterby.

"I must have been half out of my mind when I did it," muttered Mr. Tetterby.

"My senses must have forsook me. That's the only way in which I can explain it to myself," said Mrs. Tetterby, with elaboration.

In this mood they sat down to breakfast. The little Tetterbys were not habituated to regard that meal in the light of a sedentary occupation, but discussed it as a dance or trot; rather resembling a savage ceremony, in the occasional shrill whoops, and brandishings of bread and butter, with which it was accompanied, as well as the intricate filings off into the street and back again, and the hoppings up and down the doorsteps, which were incidental to the performance. In the present instance, the contentions between these Tetterby children for the milk-and-water jug, common to all, which stood upon the table, presented so lamentable an instancce of angry passions risen very high indeed, that it was an outrage on the memory of Doctor Watts. It was not until Mr. Tetterby had driven the whole herd out at the front door, that a moment's peace was secured; and even that was broken by the discovery that Johnny had surreptitiously come back, and was at that instant choking in the jug like a ventriloquist, in his indecent and rapacious haste.

"These children will be the death of me at last!" said Mrs. Tetterby, after banishing the culprit. "And the sooner the better, I think."

"Poor people," said Mr. Tetterby, "ought not to have children at all. They give us no pleasure."

He was at that moment taking up the cup which Mrs. Tetterby had rudely pushed towards him, and Mrs. Tetterby was lifting her own cup to her lips, when they were both stopped, as if they were transfixed.

"Here! Mother! Father!" cried Johnny, running into the room. "Here's Mrs. William, coming down the street!"

And if ever, since the world began, a young boy took a baby from a cradle with the care of an old nurse, and hushed and soothed it tenderly, and tottered away with it cheerfully, Johnny was that boy, and Moloch was that baby, as they went out together!

Mr. Tetterby put down his cup; Mrs. Tetterby put down her cup. Mr. Tetterby rubbed his forehead; Mrs. Tetterby rubbed hers. Mr. Tetterby's face began to smooth and brighten; Mrs. Tetterby's began to smooth and brighten. "Why, Lord forgive me," said Mr. Tetterby to himself, "what evil tempers have I been giving way to? What has been the matter here!"

"How could I ever treat him ill again, after all I said and felt last night!" sobbed Mrs. Tetterby, with her apron to her eyes.

"Am I a brute," said Mr. Tetterby, "or is there any good in me at all? Sophia! My little woman!"

"'Dolphus dear," returned his wife.

"I—I've been in a state of mind," said Mr. Tetterby, "that I can't a-bear to think of, Sophy."

"Oh! It's nothing to what I've been in, Dolf," cried his wife in a great burst of grief.

"My Sophia," said Mr. Tetterby, "don't take on. I never shall forgive myself. I must have nearly broke your heart, I know."

"No, Dolf, no. It was me! Me!" cried Mrs. Tetterby.

"My little woman," said her husband, "don't. You make me reproach my self dreadful, when you show such a noble spirit. Sophia, my dear, you don't know what I thought. I showed it bad enough, no doubt; but what I thought, my little woman!"——

"Oh, dear Dolf, don't! Don't," cried his wife.

"Sophia," said Mr. Tetterby, "I must reveal it. I couldn't rest in my conscience unless I mentioned it. My little woman"——

"Mrs. William's very nearly here!" screamed Johnny at the door.

"My little woman, I wondered how," gasped Mr. Tetterby, supporting himself by his chair, "I wondered how I had ever admired you—I forgot the precious children you have brought about me, and thought you didn't look as slim as I could wish. I—I never gave a recollection," said Mr. Tetterby, with severe self-accusation, "to the cares you've had as my wife, and along of me and mine, when you might have had hardly any with another man, who got on better and was luckier than me (any body might have found such a man easily I am sure); and I quarrelled with you for having aged a little in the rough years you have lightened for me. Can you believe it, my little woman? I hardly can myself."

Mrs. Tetterby, in a whirlwind of laughing and crying, caught his face within her hands, and held it there.

"Oh, Dolf!" she cried. "I am so happy that you thought so; I am so grateful that you thought so! For I thought that you were common-looking, Dolf; and so you are, my dear, and may you be the commonest of all sights in my eyes, till you close them with your own good hands. I thought that you were small; and so you are, and I'll make much of you because you are, and more of you because I love my husband. I thought that you began to stoop; and so you do, and you shall lean on me, and I'll do all I can to keep you up. I thought there was no air about you; but there is and it's the air of home, and that's the purest and the best there is, and God bless home once more, and all belonging to it, Dolf!"

"Hurrah! Here's Mrs. William!" cried Johnny.

So she was, and all the children with her; and as she came in, they kissed her, and kissed one another, and kissed the baby, and kissed their father and mother, and then ran back and flocked and danced about her, trooping on with her in triumph.

Mr. and Mrs. Tetterby were not a bit behindhand in the warmth of their reception. They were as much attracted to her as the children were; they ran towards her, kissed her hands, pressed round her, could not receive her ardently or enthusiastically enough. She came among them like the spirit of all goodness, affection, gentle consideration, love, and domesticity.

"What! are you all so glad to see me, too, this bright Christmas morning?" said Milly, clapping her hands in a pleasant wonder. "Oh, dear, how delightful this is!"

More shouting from the children, more kissing, more trooping round her, more happiness, more love, more joy, more honor, on all sides, than she could bear.

"Oh, dear!" said Milly, "what delicious tears you make me shed. How can I ever have deserved this! What have I done to be so loved?"

"Who can help it!" cried Mr. Tetterby.

"Who can help it!" cried Mrs. Tetterby.

"Who can help it!" echoed the children, in a joyful chorus. And they danced and trooped about her again, and clung to her, and laid their rosy faces against her dress, and kissed and fondled it, and could not fondle it, or her, enough.

"I never was so moved," said Milly, drying her eyes, "as I have been this morning. I must tell you, as soon as I can speak. Mr. Redlaw came to me at sunrise, and with a tenderness in his manner, more as if I had been his darling daughter than myself, implored me to go with him to where William's brother George is lying ill. We went together, and all the way along he was so kind, and so subdued, and seemed to put such trust and hope in me, that I could not help crying with pleasure. When we got to the house, we met a woman at the door (somebody had bruised and hurt her, I am afraid) who caught me by the hand, and blessed me as I passed."

"She was right," said Mr. Tetterby. Mrs. Tetterby said she was right. All the children cried out she was right.

"Ah, but there's more than that," said Milly. "When we got up stairs, into the room, the sick man, who had lain for hours in a state from which no effort could rouse him, rose up in his bed, and, bursting into tears, stretched out his arms to me, and said that he had led a mis-spent life, but that he was truly repentant now, in his sorrow for the past, which was all as plain to him as a great prospect, from which a dense black cloud had cleared away, and that he entreated me to ask his poor old father for his pardon, and his blessing, and to say a prayer beside his bed. And when I did so, Mr. Redlaw joined in it so fervently, and then so thanked and thanked me, and thanked Heaven, that my heart quite overflowed, and I could have done nothing but sob and cry, if the sick man had not begged me to sit down by him—which made me quiet of course. As I sat there, he held my hand in his until he sunk in a doze; and even then, when I withdrew my hand to leave him to come here (which Mr. Redlaw was very earnest indeed in wishing me to do), his hand felt for mine, so that some one else was obliged to take my place and make believe to give him my hand back. Oh, dear, oh, dear," said Milly, sobbing. "How thankful and how happy I should feel, and do feel, for all this!"

While she was speaking, Redlaw had come in, and, after pausing for a moment to observe the group of which she was the center, had silently ascended the stairs. Upon those stairs he now appeared again; remaining there, while the young student passed him, and came running down.

"Kind nurse, gentlest, best of creatures," he said, falling on his knee to her, and catching at her hand, "forgive my cruel ingratitude!"

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" cried Milly innocently, "here's another of them! Oh, dear, here's somebody else who likes me. What shall I ever do!"

The guileless, simple way in which she said it, and in which she put her hands before her eyes and wept for very happiness, was as touching as it was delightful.

"I was not myself," he said. "I don't know what it was—it was some consequence of my disorder perhaps—I was mad. But I am so no longer. Almost as I speak, I am restored. I heard the children crying out your name, and the shade passed from me at the very sound of it. Oh, don't weep! Dear Milly, if you could read my heart, and only know with what affection and what grateful homage it is glowing, you would not let me see you weep. It is such deep reproach."

"No, no," said Milly, "it's not that. It's not, indeed. It's wonder that you should think it necessary to ask me to forgive so little, and yet it's pleasure that you do."

"And will you come again? and will you finish the little curtain?"

"No," said Milly, drying her eyes, and shaking her head. "You won't care for my needle work now."

"Is it forgiving me, to say that?"

She beckoned him aside, and whispered in his ear.

"There is news from your home, Mr. Edmund."

"News? How?"

"Either your not writing when you were very ill, or the change in your handwriting when you began to be better, created some suspicion of the truth; however that is—but you're sure you'll not be the worse for any news, if it's not bad news?"

"Sure."

"Then there's some one come!" said Milly.

"My mother?" asked the student, glancing round involuntarily towards Redlaw, who had come down from the stairs.

"Hush! No," said Milly.

"It can be no one else."

"Indeed," said Milly, "are you sure?"

"It is not"—— Before he could say more, she put her hand close upon his mouth.

"Yes it is!" said Milly. "The young lady (she is very like the miniature, Mr. Edmund, but she is prettier) was too unhappy to rest without satisfying her doubts, and came up, last night, with a little servant-maid. As you always dated your letters from the college, she came there; and before I saw Mr. Redlaw this morning, I saw her. She likes me too!" said Milly. "Oh, dear, that's another?"

"This morning! Where is she now?"

"Why, she is now," said Milly, advancing her lips to his ear, "in my little parlor in the Lodge, and waiting to see you."

He pressed her hand, and was darting off, but she detained him.

"Mr. Redlaw is much altered, and has told me this morning that his memory is impaired. Be very considerate to him, Mr. Edmund; he needs that from us all."

The young man assured her, by a look, that her caution was not ill-bestowed; and as he passed the chemist on his way out, bent respectfully and with an obvious interest before him.

Redlaw returned the salutation courteously and even humbly, and looked after him as he passed on. He drooped his head upon his hand, too, as trying to reawaken something he had lost. But it was gone. The abiding change that had come upon him since the influence of the music, and the phantom's reappearance, was, that now he truly felt how much he had lost, and could compassionate his own condition, and contrast it, clearly, with the natural state of those who were around him. In this, an interest in those who were around him was revived, and a meek, submissive sense of his calamity was bred, resembling that sometimes obtains in age, when its mental powers are weakened, without insensibility or sullenness being added to the list of its infirmities.

He was conscious that, as he redeemed, through Milly, more and more of the evil he had done, and as he was more and more with her, this change ripened itself within him. Therefore, and because of the attachment she inspired him with (but without other hope), he felt that he was quite dependent on her, and that she was his staff in his affliction.

So, when she asked him whether they should go home now, to where the old man and her husband were, and he readily replied "yes"—being anxious in that regard—he put his arm through hers, and walked beside her, not as if he were the wise and learned man to whom the wonders of nature were an open book, and hers were the uninstructed mind, but as if their two positions were reversed, and he knew nothing, and she all.

He saw the children throng about her, and caress her, as he and she went away together thus, out of the house; he heard the ringing of their laughter, and their merry voices; he saw their bright faces, clustering around him like flowers; he witnessed the renewed contentment and affection of their parents; he breathed the simple air of their poor home, restored to its tranquillity; he thought of the unwholesome blight he had shed upon it, and might, but for her, have been diffusing then; and perhaps it is no wonder that he walked submissively beside her, and drew her gentle bosom nearer to his own.

When they arrived at the Lodge, the old man was sitting in his chair in the chimney-corner, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and his son was leaning against the opposite side of the fire place, looking at him. As she came in at the door, both started, and turned round towards her, and a radiant change came upon their faces.

"Oh, dear, dear, dear, they are pleased to see me like the rest!" cried Milly, clapping her hands in an ecstasy, and stopping short. "Here are two more!"

Pleased to see her! Pleasure was no word for it. She ran into her husband's arms, thrown wide open to receive her, and he would have been glad to have her there, with her head lying on his shoulder, through the short winter's day. But the old man couldn't spare her. He had arms for her too, and he locked her in them.

"Why, where has my quiet Mouse been all this time?" said the old man. "She has been a long while away. I find that it's impossible for me to get on without Mouse. I—where's my son William? I fancy I have been dreaming, William."

"That's what I say myself, father," returned his son. "I have been in an ugly sort of dream, I think. How are you, father? Are you pretty well?"

"Strong and brave, my boy," returned the old man.

It was quite a sight to see Mr. William shaking hands with his father, and patting him on the back, and rubbing him gently down with his hand, as if he could not possibly do enough to show an interest in him.

"What a wonderful man you are, father! How are you, father? Are you really pretty hearty, though?" said William, shaking hands with him again, and patting him again, rubbing him gently down again.

"I never was fresher or stouter in my life, my boy."

"What a wonderful man you are, father! But that's exactly where it is," said Mr. William, with enthusiasm. "When I think of all my father's gone through, and all the chances and changes, and sorrows and troubles, that have happened to him in the course of his long life, and under which his head has grown gray, and years upon years have gathered on it, I feel as if we couldn't do enough to honor the old gentleman, and make his old age easy. How are you, father? Are you really pretty well, though?"

Mr. William might never have left off repeating this inquiry, and shaking hands with him again, and patting him again, and rubbing him down again, if the old man had not espied the chemist, whom until now he had not seen.

"I ask your pardon, Mr. Redlaw," said Philip, "but didn't know you were here, sir, or should have made less free. It reminds me, Mr. Redlaw, seeing you here on a Christmas morning, of the time when you was a student yourself, and worked so hard that you was backwards and forwards in our library even at Christmas time. Ha! ha! I'm old enough to remember that; and I remember it right well, I do, though I am eighty-seven. It was after you left here that my poor wife died. You remember my poor wife, Mr. Redlaw?"

The chemist answered yes.

"Yes," said the old man. "She was a dear creetur. I recollect you come here one Christmas morning with a young lady—I ask your pardon, Mr. Redlaw, but I think it was a sister you was very much attached to?"

The chemist looked at him, and shook his head. "I had a sister," he said, vacantly. He knew no more.

"One Christmas morning," pursued the old man, "that you come here with her—and it began to snow, and my wife invited the young lady to walk in, and sit by the fire that is always a-burning on Christmas Day in what used to be, before our ten poor gentlemen commuted, our great dinner hall. I was there; and I recollect, as I was stirring up the blaze for the young lady to warm her pretty feet by, she read the scroll out loud, that is underneath that picter. 'Lord, keep my memory green!' She and my poor wife fell a-talking about it; and it's a strange thing to think of, now, that they both said (both being so unlike to die) that it was a good prayer, and that it was one they would put up very earnestly, if they were called away young, with reference to those who were dearest to them. 'My brother,' says the young lady—'My husband,' says my poor wife. 'Lord, keep his memory of me green, and do not let me be forgotten!'"

Tears more painful, and more bitter than he had ever shed in all his life, coursed down Redlaw's face. Philip, fully occupied in recalling his story, had not observed him until now, nor Milly's anxiety that he should not proceed.

"Philip!" said Redlaw, laying his hand upon his arm, "I am a stricken man, on whom the hand of Providence has fallen heavily, although deservedly. You speak to me, my friend, of what I cannot follow; my memory is gone."

"Merciful power!" cried the old man.

"I have lost my memory of sorrow, wrong, and trouble," said the chemist, "and with that I have lost all man would remember!"

To see old Philip's pity for him, to see him wheel his own great chair for him to rest in, and look down upon him with a solemn sense of his bereavement, was to know, in some degree, how precious to old age such recollections are.

The boy came running in, and ran to Milly.

"Here's the man," he said, "in the other room. I don't want him."

"What man does he mean?" asked Mr. William.

"Hush!" said Milly.

Obedient to a sign from her, he and his old father softly withdrew. As they went out, unnoticed, Redlaw beckoned to the boy to come to him.

"I like the woman best," he answered, holding to her skirts.

"You are right," said Redlaw, with a faint smile. "But you needn't fear to come to me. I am gentler than I was. Of all the world, to you, poor child!"

The boy still held back at first, but yielding little by little to her urging he consented to approach, and even to sit down at his feet. As Redlaw laid his hand upon the shoulder of the child, looking on him with compassion and a fellow-feeling, he put out his other hand to Milly. She stooped down on that side of him, so that she could look into his face, and after silence, said:

"Mr. Redlaw, may I speak to you?"

"Yes," he answered, fixing his eyes upon her. "Your voice and music are the same to me."

"May I ask you something?"

"What you will."

"Do you remember what I said, when I knocked at your door last night? About one who was your friend once, and who stood on the verge of destruction?"

"Yes. I remember," he said, with some hesitation.

"Do you understand it?"

He smoothed the boy's hair—looking at her fixedly the while, and shook his head.

"This person," said Milly, in her clear, soft voice, which her mild eyes, looking at him, made clearer and softer, "I found soon afterwards. I went back to the house, and, with Heaven's help, traced him. I was not too soon. A very little and I should have been too late."

He took his hand from the boy, and laying it on the back of that hand of hers, whose timid and yet earnest touch addressed him no less appealingly than her voice and eyes, looked more intently on her.

"He is the father of Mr. Edmund, the young gentleman we saw just now. His real name is Longford. You recollect the name?"

"I recollect the name."

"And the man?"

"No, not the man. Did he ever wrong me?"

"Yes."

"Ah! Then it's hopeless—hopeless."

He shook his head, and softly beat upon the hand he held, as though mutely asking her commiseration.

"I did not go to Mr. Edmund last night," said Milly. "You will listen to me just the same as if you did remember all?"

"To every syllable you say."

"Both, because I did not know, then, that this really was his father, and because I was fearful of the effect of such intelligence upon him, after his illness, if it should be. Since I have known who this person is, I have not gone either; but that is for another reason. He has long been separated from his wife and son--has been a stranger to his home almost from this son's infancy, I learn from him—and has abandoned and deserted what he should have held most dear. In all that time he has been falling from the state of a gentleman, more and more, until"—she rose up, hastily, and going out for a moment, returned, accompanied by the wreck that Redlaw had beheld last night.

"Do you know me?" asked the chemist.

"I should be glad," returned the other, "and that is an unwonted word for me to use, if I could answer no."

The chemist looked at the man, standing in self-abasement and degradation before him, and would have looked longer, in an ineffectual struggle for enlightenment but, that Milly resumed her late position by his side, and attracted his attentive gaze to her own face.

"See how low he is sunk, how lost he is!" she whispered, stretching out her arm towards him, without looking from the chemist's face. "If you could remember all that is connected with him, do you not think it would move your pity to reflect that one you ever loved (do not let us mind how long ago, or in what belief that he has forfeited), should come to this?"

"I hope it would," he answered. "I believe it would."

His eyes wandered to the figure standing near the door, but came back speedily to her, on whom he gazed intently, as if he strove to learn some lesson from every tone of her voice, and every beam of her eyes.

"I have no learning, and you have much," said Milly; "I am not used to think, and your are always thinking. May I tell you why it seems to me a good thing for us, to remember wrong that has been done us?"

"Yes."

"That we may forgive it."

"Pardon me, great Heaven!" said Redlaw, lifting up his eyes, "for having thrown away thine own high attribute!"

"And if," said Milly, "if your memory should one day be restored, as we will hope and pray it may be, would it not be a blessing to you to recall at once a wrong and its forgiveness?"

He looked at the figure by the door, and fastened his attentive eyes on her again; a ray of clearer light appeared to him to shine into his mind, from her bright face.

"He cannot go to his abandoned home. He does not seek to go there. He knows that he could only carry shame and trouble to those he has so cruelly neglected, and that the best reparation he can make them now, is to avoid them. A very little money carefully bestowed, would remove him to some distant place, where he might live and do no wrong, and make such atonement as is left within his power for the wrong he has done. To the unfortunate lady who is his wife, and to his son, this would be the best and kindest boon that their best friend could give them—one, too, that they need never know of; and to him, shattered in reputation, mind, and body, it might be salvation."

He took her head between his hands, and kissed it, and said: "It shall be done, I trust to you to do it for me, now and secretly; and to tell him that I would forgive him, if I were so happy as to know for what."

As she rose, and turned her beaming face towards the fallen man, implying that her mediation had been successful, he advanced a step and without raising his eyes, addressed himself to Redlaw.

"You are so generous," he said—"you ever were—that you will try to banish your rising sense of retribution in the spectacle that is before you. I do not try to banish it from myself, Redlaw. If you can believe me."

The chemist entreated Milly, by a gesture, to come nearer to him; and, as he listened, looked in her face, as if to find in it the clue to what he heard.

"I am too decayed a wretch to make professions; I recollect my own career too well to array any such before you. But from the day on which I made my first step downward, in dealing falsely by you, I have gone down with a certain, steady, doomed progression. That, I say."

Redlaw, keeping her close at his side, turned his face towards the speaker, and there was sorrow in it. Something like mournful recognition too.

"I might have been another man, my life might have been another life, if I had avoided that first fatal step. I don't know that it would have been. I claim nothing for the possibility. Your sister is at rest, and better than she could have been with me, if I had continued even what you thought me; even what I once supposed myself to be."

Redlaw made a hasty motion with his hand, as if he would have put that subject on one side.

"I speak," the other went on, "like a man taken from the grave. I should have made my own grave, last night, had it not been for this blessed hand."

"Oh, dear, he likes me, too!" sobbed Milly, under her breath. "That's another!"

"I could not have put myself in your way, last night, even for bread. But to-day, my recollection of what has been is so strongly stirred, and is presented to me, I don't know how, so vividly, that I have dared to come at her suggestion, and to take your bounty, and to thank you for it, and to beg you, Redlaw, in your dying hour, to be as merciful to me in your thoughts, as you are in your deeds."

He turned towards the door, and stopped a moment on his way forth.

"I hope my son may interest you for his mother's sake. I hope he may deserve to do so. Unless my life should be preserved a long time, and I should know that I have not misused your aid, I shall never look upon him more."

Going out, he raised his eyes to Redlaw for the first time. Redlaw, whose steadfast gaze was fixed upon him, dreamily held out his hand. He returned and touched it —little more—with both his own—and bending down his head, went slowly out.

In a few moments that elapsed, while Milly silently took him to the gate, the chemist dropped into his chair, and covered his face with his hands. Seeing him thus, when she came back, accompanied by her husband and his father (who were both greatly concerned for him), she avoided disturbing him, or permitting him to be disturbed; and kneeled down near the chair to put some warm clothing on the boy.

"That's exactly where it is. That's what I always say, father!" exclaimed her admiring husband. "There's a motherly feeling in Mrs. William's breast that must and will have went!"

"Ay, ay," said the old man; "you're right. My son William's right!"

"It happens all for the best, Milly dear, no doubt," said Mr. William, tenderly, "that we have no children of our own; and yet I sometimes wish you had one to love and cherish. Our little dead child that you built such hopes upon, and that never breathed the breath of life—it has made you quiet-like, Milly."

"I am very happy in the recollection of it, William dear," she answered. "I think of it every day."

"I was afraid you thought of it a good deal."

"Don't say afraid; it is a comfort to me; it speaks to me in so many ways. The innocent thing that never lived on earth, is like an angel to me, William."

"You are like an angel to father and me," said Mr. William, softly. "I know that."

"When I think of all those hopes I built upon it, and the many times I sat and pictured to myself the little smiling face upon my bosom that never lay there, and the sweet eyes turned up to mine that never opened to the light," said Milly, "I can feel a greater tenderness, I think, for all the disappointed hopes in which there is no harm. When I see a beautiful child in its fond mother's arms, I love it all the better, thinking that my child might have been like that, and might have made my heart as proud and happy."

Redlaw raised his head, and looked towards her.

"All through life, it seems by me," she continued, "to tell me something. For poor neglected children, my little child pleads as if it were alive, and had a voice I knew, with which to speak to me. When I hear of youth in suffering or shame, I think that my child might have come to that, perhaps, and that God took it from me in his mercy. Even in age and gray hair, such as father's is at present: saying that it, too, might have lived to be old, long and long after you and I were gone, and to have needed the respect and love of younger people."

Her quiet voice was quieter than ever, as she took her husband's arm, and laid her head against it.

"Children love me so, that sometimes I half fancy—it's a silly fancy, William—they have some way I don't know of, of feeling for my little child, and me, and understanding why their love is precious to me. If I have been quiet since, I have been more happy, William, in a hundred ways. Not least happy, dear, in this—that even when my little child was born and dead but a few days and I was weak and sorrowful, and could not help grieving a little, the thought arose, that if I tried to lead a good life, I should meet in Heaven, a bright creature, who would call me, mother!"

Redlaw fell upon his knees, with a loud cry.

"O Thou," he said, "who through the teaching of pure love, has graciously restored me to the memory which was the memory of Christ upon the cross, and of all the good who perished in His cause, receive my thanks, and bless her!"

Then, he folded her to his heart; and Milly, sobbing more than ever, cried, as she laughed: "He is come back to himself! He likes me very much indeed, too? Oh, dear, dear, dear me, here's another!"

Then, the student entered, leading by the hand a lovely girl, who was afraid to come. And Redlaw, so changed towards him, seeing in him and his youthful choice, the softened shadow of that chastening passage in his own life to which, as to a shady tree, the dove so long imprisoned in his solitary ark might fly for rest and company, fell upon his neck, entreating them to be his children.

Then, as Christmas is a time in which, of all times in the year, the memory of every remediable sorrow, wrong, and trouble in the world around us, should be active with us, not less than our own experiences, for all good, he laid his hand upon the boy, and, silently calling Him to witness who laid His hand on children in old time, rebuking, in the majesty of His prophetic knowledge, those who kept them from Him, vowed to protect him, teach him, and reclaim him.

Then he gave his right hand cheerily to Philip, and said that they would that day hold a Christmas dinner in what used to be, before the ten poor gentlemen commuted, their great dinner hall; and that they would bid to it as many of that Swidger family, who, his son had told him, were so numerous that they might join hands and make a ring round England, as could be brought together on so short a notice.

And it was that day done. There were so many Swidgers there, grown up and children, that an attempt to state them in round numbers might engender doubts, in the distrustful, of the veracity of this history. Therefore the attempt shall not be made. But there they were, by dozens and scores—and there was good news and good hope there, ready for them, of George, who had been visited again by his father and brother, and by Milly, and again left in a quiet sleep. There, present at the dinner, too, were the Tetterbys, including young Adolphus, who arrived in his prismatic comforter, in good time for the beef. Johnny and the baby were too late, of course, and came in all on one side, the one exhausted, the other in a supposed state of double-tooth; but that was customary, and not alarming.

It was sad to see the child who had no name or lineage, watching the other children as they played, not knowing how to talk with them, or sport with them, and more strange to ways of childhood than a rough dog. It was sad, though in a different way, to see what an instinctive knowledge the youngest children there, had of his being different from all the rest, and how they made timid approaches to him with soft words, and touches, and with little presents, that he might not be unhappy. But he kept by Milly, and began to love her—that was another, as she said!—and, as they all liked her dearly, they were glad of that, and when they saw him peeping at them behind her chair, they were pleased that he was so close to it.

All this, the chemist, sitting with the student and his bride that was to be, and Philip, and the rest saw.

Some people have said since that he only thought what has been herein set down; others, that he read it in the fire one winter night about the twilight time; others, that the ghost was but the representation of his own gloomy thoughts, and Milly the embodiment of his better wisdom. I say nothing.

Except this. That as they were assembled in the old hall, by no other light than that of a great fire (having dined early), the shadows once more stole out of their hiding places, and danced about the room, showing the children marvelous shapes and faces on the walls, and gradually changing what was real and familiar there, to what was wild and magical. But that there was one thing in the hall, to which the eyes of Redlaw, and of Milly and her husband, and of the old man, and of the student, and his bride that was to be, were often turned, which the shadows did not obscure or change. Deepened in its gravity by the firelight, and gazing from the darkness of the paneled wall like life, the sedate face in the portrait, with the beard and ruff, looked down at them from under its verdant wreath of holly, as they looked up at it; and, clear and plain below, as if a voice had uttered them, were the words,

" Lord, keep my memory green."

REPRINTED PIECES

By CHARLES DICKENS

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SOMEBODY'S LUGGAGE.

IN TWO CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

HIS LEAVING IT TILL CALLED FOR.

THE writer of these humble lines being a waiter, and having come of a family of waiters, and owning at the present time five brothers who are all waiters, and likewise an only sister who is a waitress, would wish to offer a few words respecting his calling; first having the pleasure of hereby in a friendly manner offering the dedication of the same unto Joseph, much-respected head waiter at the Slamjam Coffee-House, London, E. C., than which an individual more eminently deserving of the name of man, or a more amenable honor to his own head and heart, whether considered in the light of a waiter or regarded as a human being, do not exist.

In case confusion should arise in the public mind (which it is open to confusion on many subjects) respecting what is meant or implied by the term waiter, the present humble lines would wish to offer an explanation. It may not be generally known that the person as goes out to wait is not a waiter. It may not be generally known that the hand as is called in extra at the Freemasons' Tavern, or the London, or the Albion, or otherwise, is not a waiter. Such hands may be took on for public dinners by the bushel (and you may know them by their breathing with difficulty when in attendance, and taking away the bottle ere yet it is half out); but such are not waiters. For you cannot lay down the tailoring, or the shoemaking, or the brokering, or the green-grocering, or the pictorial-periodicalling, or the second-hand wardrobe, or the small fancy businesses—you cannot lay down those lines of life at your will and pleasure by the half-day or evening and take up waiting. You may suppose you can, but you cannot; or you may go so far as to say you do, but you do not. Nor yet can you lay down the gentleman's-service when stimulated by prolonged incompatibility on the part of cooks (and here it may be remarked that cooking and incompatibility will be mostly found united), and take up waiting. It has been ascertained that what a gentleman will sit meek under at home he will not bear out of doors, at the Slamjam or any similar establishment. Then what is the interference to be drawn respecting true waitering? You must be bred to it. You must be born to it.

Would you know how born to it, fair reader, if of the adorable female sex? Then learn from the biographical experience of one that is a waiter in the sixty-first year of his age.

You were conveyed—ere yet your dawning powers were otherwise developed than to harbor vacancy in your inside—you were conveyed by surreptitious means into a pantry adjoining the Admiral Nelson, civic and general dining-rooms, there to receive by stealth that healthful sustenance which is the pride and boast of the British female constitution. Your mother was married to your father (himself a distant waiter) in the profoundest secrecy; for a waitress known to be married would ruin the best of businesses—it is the same as on the stage. Hence your being smuggled into the pantry, and that—to add to the infliction—by an unwilling grandmother. Under the combined influence of the smells of roast and boiled, and soup, and gas, and malt liquors, you partook of your earliest nourishment; your unwilling grandmother sitting prepared to catch you when your mother was called and dropped you; your grandmother's shawl ever ready to stifle your natural complainings; your innocent mind surrounded by uncongenial cruets, dirty plates, dish-covers, and cold gravy; your mother calling down the pipe for veals and porks, instead of soothing you with nursery rhymes. Under these untoward circumstances you were early weaned. Your unwilling grandmother, ever growing more unwilling as your food assimilated less, then contracted habits of shaking you till your system curdled, and your food would not assimilate at all. At length she was no longer spared, and could have been thankfully spared much sooner. When your brothers began to appear in succession, your mother retired, left off her smart dressing (she had previously been a smart dresser) and her dark ringlets (which had previously been flowing), and haunted your father late of nights, lying in wait for him, through all weathers, up the shabby court which led to the back door of the Royal Old Dust-Bin (said to have been so named by George the Fourth), where your father was head. But the Dust-Bin was going down then, and your father took but little—excepting from a liquid point of view. Your mother's object in those visits was of a housekeeping character, and you was set on to whistle your father out. Sometimes he came out, but generally not. Come or not come, however, all that part of his existence which was unconnected with open waitering was kept a close secret, and was acknowledged by your mother to be a close secret, and you and your mother flitted about the court, close secrets both of you, and would scarcely have confessed under torture that you knew your father, or that your father had any name than Dick (which wasn't his name, though he was never known by any other), or that he had kith or kin, or chick or child. Perhaps the attraction of this mystery, combined with your father's having a damp compartment to himself, behind a leaky cistern, at the Dust-Bin—a sort of a cellar compartment, with a sink in it, and a smell, and a plate-rack, and a bottle-rack, and three windows that didn't match each other or anything else, and no daylight—caused your young mind to feel convinced that you must grow up to be a waiter too; but you did feel convinced of it, and so did all your brothers, down to your sister. Every one of you felt convinced that you was born to the waitering. At this stage of your career, what was your feelings one day when your father came home to your mother in open broad daylight—of itself an act of madness on the part of a waiter—and took to his bed (leastwise, your mother and family's bed), with the statement that his eyes were deviled kidneys. Physicians being in vain, your father expired, after repeating at intervals for a day and a night, when gleams of reason and old business fitfully illuminated his being, "Two and two is five. And three is sixpence." Interred in the parochial department of the neighboring churchyard, and accompanied to the grave by as many waiters of long standing as could spare the morning time from their soiled glasses (namely, one), your bereaved form was attired in a white neckankecher, and you was took on from motives of benevolence at the George and Gridiron, theatrical and supper. Here, supporting nature on what you found in the plates (which was as it happened, and but too often thoughtlessly immersed in mustard) and on what you found in the glasses (which rarely went beyond driblets and lemon), by night you dropped asleep standing, till you was cuffed awake, and by day was set to polishing every individual article in the coffee-room. Your couch being sawdust; your counterpane being ashes of cigars. Here, frequently hiding a heavy heart under the smart tie of your white neckankecher (or, correctly speaking, lower down and more to the left), you picked up the rudiments of knowledge from an extra, by the name of Bishops, and by calling platewasher, and gradually elevating your mind with chalk on the back of the corner-box partition, until such time as you used the ink-stand when it was out of hand, attained to manhood and to be the waiter that you find yourself.

I could wish here to offer a few respectful words on behalf of the calling so long the calling of myself and family, and the public interest in which is but too often very limited. We are not generally understood. No, we are not. Allowance enough is not made for us. For, say that we ever show a little drooping listlessness of spirits, or what might be termed indifference or apathy. Put it to yourself what would your own state of mind be, if you was one of an enormous family every member of which except you was always greedy and in a hurry. Put it to yourself that you was regularly replete with animal food at the slack hours of one in the day and again at nine P.M., and that the repleter you was, the more voracious all your fellow-creatures came in. Put it to yourself that it was your business, when your digestion was well on, to take a personal interest and sympathy in a hundred gentlemen fresh and fresh (say, for the sake of argument, only a hundred), whose imaginations was given up to grease and fat and gravy and melted butter, and abandoned to questioning you about cuts of this and dishes of that—each of 'em going on as if him and you and the bill of fare was alone in the world. Then look what you are expected to know. You are never out, but they seem to think you regularly attend everywhere. "What's this, Christopher, that I hear about the smashed excursion train?" "How are they doing at the Italian opera, Christopher?" "Christopher, what are the real particulars of this business at the Yorkshire bank?" Similarly a ministry gives me more trouble than it gives the queen. As to Lord Palmerston, the constant and wearing connection into which I have been brought with his lordship during the last few years is deserving of a pension. Then look at the hypocrites we are made, and the lies (white, I hope) that are forced upon us! Why must a sedentary-puriusted waiter be considered to be a judge of horse-flesh, and to have a most tremendous interest in horse-training and racing? Yet it would be half our little incomes out of our pockets if we didn't take on to have those sporting tastes. It is the same (inconceivable why!) with farming. Shooting, equally so. I am sure that so regular as the months of August, September, and October come round, I am ashamed of myself in my own private bosom for the way in which I make believe to care whether or not the grouse is strong on the wing (much their wings or drumsticks either signifies to me, uncooked!), and whether the partridges is plentiful among the turnips, and whether the pheasants is shy or bold, or anything else you please to mention. Yet you may see me, or any other waiter of my standing, holding on by the back of the box, and leaning over a gentleman with his purse out and his bill before him discussing these points in a confidential tone of voice, as if my happiness in life entirely depended on 'em.

I have mentioned our little incomes. Look at the most unreasonable point of all, and the point on which the greatest injustice is done us! Whether it is owing to our always carrying so much change in our right-hand trousers pocket, and so many halfpence in our coal-tails, or whether it is human nature (which I were loath to believe), what is meant by the everlasting fable that head waiters is rich? How did that fable get into circulation? Who first put it about, and what are the facts to establish the unblushing statement? Come forth, thou slanderer, and refer the public to the waiter's will in Doctors' Commons supporting thy malignant hiss! Yet this is so commonly dwelt upon—especially by the screws who give waiters the least—that denial is vain; and we are obliged, for our credit's sake, to carry our heads as if we were going into a business, when of the two we are much more likely to go into a union. There was formerly a screw as frequented the Slamjam ere yet the present writer had quitted that establishment on a question of tea-ing his assistant staff out of his own pocket, which screw carried the taunt to its bitterest heighth. Never soaring above threepence, and as often as not groveling on the earth a penny lower, he yet represented the present writer as a large holder of Consols, a leader of money on mortgage, a capitalist. He has been overheard to dilate to other customers on the allegation that the present writer put out thousands of pounds at interest in distilleries and breweries. "Well, Christopher," he would say (having groveled his lowest on the earth half a moment before), "looking out for a house to open, eh? Can't find a business to be disposed of on a scale as is up to your resources, humph?" To such a dizzy precipice of falsehood has this misrepresentation taken wing, that the well-known and highly respected old Charles long eminent at the West Country Hotel, and by some considered the father of the waitering, found himself under the obligation to fall into it through so many years that his own wife (for he had an unbeknown old lady in that capacity toward himself) believed it! And what was the consequence? When he was borne to his grave on the shoulders of six picked waiters, with six more for change, six more acting as pall-bearers, all keeping step in a pouring shower without a dry eye visible, and a concourse only inferior to royalty, his pantry and lodgings was equally ransacked high and low for property, and none was found. How could it be found, when, beyond his last monthly collection of walking-sticks, umbrellas, and pocket-handkerchiefs (which happened to have been not yet disposed of, though he had ever been through life punctual in clearing off his collection by the month), there was no property existing? Such, however, is the force of this universal libel that the widow of old Charles, at the present hour an inmate of the almshouses of the Cork-cutters' Company, in Blue Anchor Road (identified sitting at the door of one of 'em, in a clean cap and a Windsor arm-chair, only last Monday), expects John's hoarded wealth to be found hourly! Nay, ere yet he had succumbed to the grisly dart, and when his portrait was painted in oils, life-size, by subscription of the frequenters of the West Country, to hang over the coffee-room chimney-piece, there were not wanting those who contended that what is termed the accessories of such portrait ought to be the Bank of England out of window and a strong-box on the table. And but for better-regulated minds contending for a bottle and screw and the attitude of drawing—and carrying their point—it would have been so handed down to posterity.

I am now brought to the title of the present remarks. Having, I hope without offense to any quarter, offered such observations as I felt it my duty to offer, in a free country which has ever dominated the seas, on the general subject, I will now proceed to wait on the particular question.

At a momentous period of my life, when I was off, so far as concerned notice given, with a house that shall be nameless—for the question on which I took my departing stand was a fixed charge for waiters, and no house as commits itself to that eminently un-English act of more than foolishness and baseness shall be advertised by me—I repeat, at a momentous crisis, when I was off with a house too mean for mention, and not yet on with that to which I have ever since had the honor of being attached in the capacity of head,* I was casting about what to do next. Then it were that proposals were made to me on behalf of my present establishment. Stipulations were necessary on my part, emendations were necessary on my part; in the end, ratifications ensued on both sides, and I entered on a new career.

We are a bed business and a coffee-room business. We are not a general dining business, nor do we wish it. In consequence, when diners drop in, we know what to give 'em as will keep 'em away another time. We are a private room or family business also; but coffee-room principal. Me and the directory and the writing materials and cetrer occupy a place to ourselves—a place fended off up a step or two at the end of the coffee-room, in what I call the

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*** Its name and address at length, with other full particulars, all editorially struck out.**

good old-fashioned style. The good old-fashioned style is that whatever you want, down to a wafer, you must be olely and solely dependent on the head waiter for. You must put yourself a new-born child into his hands. There is no other way in which a business untinged with continental vice can be conducted. (It were bootless to add that if languages is required to be jabbered, and English is not good enough, both families and gentlemen had better go somewhere else.)

When I began to settle down in this right-principled and well-conducted house, I noticed under the bed in No. 24 B (which is up a angle off the staircase, and usually put off upon the lowly minded) a heap of things in a corner. I asked our head chambermaid in the course of the day:

"What are them things in 24 B?"

To which she answered, with a careless air:

"Somebody's luggage."

Regarding her with a eye not free from severity, I says: "Whose luggage?"

Evading my eye, she replied:

"Lor! How should I know!"

Being, it may be right to mention, a female of some pertness, though acquainted with her business.

A head waiter must be either head or tail. He must be at one extremity or the other of the social scale. He cannot be at the waist of it, or anywhere else but the extremities. It is for him to decide which of the extremities.

On the eventful occasion under consideration, I give Mrs. Pratchett so distinctly to understand my decision that I broke her spirit as toward myself, then and there, and for good. Let not inconsistency be suspected on account of my mentioning Mrs. Pratchett as "Mrs.," and having formerly remarked that a waitress must not be married. Readers are respectfully requested to notice that Mrs. Pratchett was not a waitress, but a chambermaid. Now a chambermaid may be married; if head, generally is married—or says so. It comes to the same thing as expressing what is customary. (N. B.—Mr. Pratchett is in Australia, and his address there is "the bush.")

Having took Mrs. Pratchett down as many pegs as was essential to the future happiness of all parties, I requested her to explain herself.

"For instance," I says, to give her a little encouragement, "who is somebody?"

"I give you my sacred honor, Mr. Christopher," answers Mrs. Pratchett, "that I haven't the faintest notion."

But for the manner in which she settled her cap-strings, I should have doubted this; but in respect of positiveness it was hardly to be discriminated from an affidavit.

"Then you never saw him?" I followed her up with.

"Nor yet," said Mrs. Pratchett, shutting her eyes, and making as if she had just took a pill of unusual circumference, which gave a remarkable force to her denial—"nor yet any servant in this house. All have been changed, Mr. Christopher, within five years, and somebody left his luggage here before them."

Inquiry of Miss Martin yielded (in the language of the Bard of A.1) "confirmation strong." So it had really and truly happened. Miss Martin is the young lady at the bar as makes out our bills: and though higher than I could wish considering her station, is perfectly well behaved.

Further investigations led to the disclosure that there was a bill against this luggage to the amount of two sixteen six. The luggage had been lying under the bedstead in 24 B over six year. The bedstead is a four-poster, with a deal of old hanging and valance, and is, as I once said, probably connected with more than 24 B's, which I remember my hearers was pleased to laugh at, at the time.

I don't know why—when do we know why?--but this luggage laid heavy on my mind. I fell a-wondering about somebody, and what he had got and been up to. I couldn't satisfy my thoughts why he should leave so much luggage against so small a bill. For I had the luggage out within a day or two, and turned it over, and the following were the items: A black portmanteau, a black bag, a desk, a dressing-case, a brown-paper parcel, a hatbox, and an umbrella strapped to a walking-stick. It was all very dusty and fluey.

The luggage so got the better of me that instead of having it put back when it was well dusted and washed with a wet cloth—previous to which it was so covered with feathers that you might have thought it was turning into poultry, and would by and by begin to lay—I say, instead of having it put back, I had it carried into one of my places downstairs. There from time to time I stared at it and stared at it, till it seemed to grow big and grow little, and come forward at me and retreat again, and go through all manner of performances resembling intoxication. When this had lasted weeks—I may say months and not be far out—I one day thought of asking Miss Martin for the particulars of the two sixteen six total. She was so obliging as to extract it from the books—it dating before her time—and here follows a true copy:

Coffee-room.
1856. No. 4.

Feb. 2,	Pen and paper	£0 0 6
	Port negus	0 2 0
	Ditto	0 2 0
	Pen and paper	0 0 6
	Tumbler broken	0 2 6
	Brandy	0 2 0
	Pen and paper	0 0 6
	Anchovy toast	0 2 6
	Pen and paper	0 0 6
	Bed	0 3 0
Feb. 3,	Pen and paper	0 0 6
	Breakfast	0 2 6
	" Broiled ham	0 2 0
	" Eggs	0 1 0
	" Watercresses	0 1 0
	" Shrimps	0 1 0
	Pen and paper	0 0 6
	Blotting-paper	0 0 6
	Messenger to Paternoster Row and back	0 1 6
	Again, when no answer	0 1 6
	Brandy 2s., deviled pork chop 2s.	0 4 0
	Pens and paper	0 1 0
	Messenger to Albemarle St. and back	0 1 0
	Again (detained), when no answer	0 1 6
	Salt-cellar broken	0 3 6
	Large liqueur glass orange brandy	0 1 6
	Dinner—soup, fish, joint, and bird	0 7 6
	Bottle old East India Brown	0 8 0
	Pen and paper	0 0 6
		£2 16 6

Mem.: January 1, 1857. He went out after dinner, directing luggage to be ready when he called for it. Never called.

So far from throwing a light upon the subject, this bill appeared to me, if I may so express my doubts, to involve it in a yet more lurid halo. Speculating it over with the mistress, she informed me that the luggage had been advertised in the master's time as being to be sold after such and such a day to pay expenses, but no further steps had been taken. (I may here remark that the mistress is a widow in her fourth year. The master was possessed of one of those unfortunate constitutions in which spirits turns to water and rises in the ill-starred victim.)

My speculating it over, not then only, but repeatedly, sometimes with the mistress, sometimes with one, sometimes with another, led up to the mistress' saying to me—whether at first in joke or in earnest, or half-joke and half-earnest, it matters not:

"Christopher, I am going to make you a handsome offer."

(If this should meet her eye—a lovely blue—may she not take it ill my mentioning that if I had been eight or ten years younger, I would have done as much by her! That is, I would have made her a offer. It is for others than me to denominate it a handsome one.)

"Christopher, I am going to make you a handsome offer."

"Put a name to it, ma'am."

"Look here, Christopher. Run over the articles of somebody's luggage. You've got it all by heart, I know."

"A black portmanteau, ma'am, a black bag, a desk, a dressing-case, a brown-paper parcel, a hat-box, and an umbrella strapped to a walking-stick."

"All just as they were left. Nothing opened, nothing tampered with."

"You are right, ma'am. All locked but the brown-paper and that sealed."

The mistress was leaning on Miss Martin's desk at the bar window, and she taps the open book that lays upon the desk—she has a pretty-made hand, to be sure—and bobs her head over it, and laughs.

"Come," says she, "Christopher. Pay me somebody's bill, and you shall have somebody's luggage."

I rather took to the idea from the first moment; but——

"It mayn't be worth the money," I objected, seeming to hold back.

"That's a lottery," says the mistress, folding her arms upon the book—it ain't her hands alone that's pretty made, the observation extends right up her arms. "Won't you venture two pound sixteen shillings and sixpence in the lottery? Why, there's no blanks!" says the mistress, laughing and bobbing her head again; "you must win. If you lose, you must win! All prizes in this lottery! Draw a blank, and remember, gentlemen-sportsmen, you'll still be entitled to a black portmanteau, a black bag, a desk, a dressing-case, a sheet of brown paper, a hat-box, and an umbrella strapped to a walking-stick!"

To make short of it, Miss Martin come round me, and Mrs. Pratchett come round me, and the mistress she was completely round me already, and all the women in the house come round me, and if it had been sixteen two instead of two sixteen, I should have thought myself well out of it. For what can you do when they do come round you?

So I paid the money—down—and such a laughing as there was among 'em! But I turned the tables on 'em regularly when I said:

"My family name is Blue-Beard. I'm going to open somebody's luggage all alone in the secret chamber, and not a female eye catches sight of the contents!"

Whether I thought proper to have the firmness to keep to this don't signify, or whether any female eye, and if any how many, was really present when the opening of the luggage came off. Somebody's luggage is the question at present: nobody's eyes, nor yet noses.

What I still look at most, in connection with that luggage, is the extraordinary quantity of writing paper, and all written on! And not our paper neither—not the paper charged in the bill, for we know our paper—so he must have been always at it. And he had crumpled up this writing of his, everywhere, in every part and parcel of his luggage. There was writing in his dressing-case, writing in his boots, writing among his shaving-tackle, writing in his hat-box, writing folded away down among the very whalebones of his umbrella.

His clothes wasn't bad, what there was of 'em. His dressing-case was poor—not a particle of silver stopper—bottle apertures with nothing in 'em, like empty little dog-kennels—and a most searching description of tooth-powder diffusing itself around, as under a deluded mistake that all the chinks in the fittings was divisions in teeth. His clothes I parted with, well enough, to a second-hand dealer not far from St. Clement's Danes, in the Strand—him as the officers in the army mostly dispose of their uniforms to when hard pressed with debts of honor, if I may judge from their coats and epaulets diversifying the window with their backs toward the public. The same party bought in one lot the portmanteau, the bag, the desk, the dressing-case, the hat-box, the umbrella, strap, and walking-stick. On my remarking that I should have thought those articles not quite in his line, he said: "No more ith a man'th grandmother, Mithter Chrithtopher; but if any man will bring hith grandmother here, and offer her at a fair trifle below what the'll feth with good luck when the'th thcoured and turned—I'll buy her!"

These transactions brought me home, and, indeed more than home, for they left a goodish profit on the original investment. And now there remained the writings; and the writings I particular wish to bring under the candid attention of the reader.

I wish to do so without postponement, for this reason. That is to say, namely, viz., *i.e.*, as follows, thus: Before I proceed to recount the mental sufferings of which I became the prey in consequence of the writings, and before following up that harrowing tale with a statement of the wonderful and impressive catastrophe, as thrilling in its nature as unlooked for in any other capacity, which crowned the ole and filled the cup of unexpectedness to overflowing, the writings themselves ought to stand forth to view. Therefore it is that they now come next. One word to introduce them, and I lay down my pen (I hope my unassuming pen) until I take it up to trace the gloomy sequel of a mind with something on it.

He was a smeary writer, and wrote a dreadful bad hand. Utterly regardless of ink, he lavished it on every undeserving object—on his clothes, his desk, his hat, the handle of his tooth-brush, his umbrella. Ink was found freely on the coffee-room carpet by No. 4 table, and two blots was on his restless couch. A reference to the document I have given entire will show that on the morning of February 3, 1856, he procured his no less than fifth pen and paper. To whatever deplorable act of ungovernable composition he immolated those materials obtained from the bar, there is no doubt that the fatal deed was committed in bed, and that it left its evidences but too plainly, long afterward, upon the pillow-case.

He had put no heading to any of his writings. Alas! Was he likely to have a heading without a head, and where was his head when he took such things into it? In some cases, such as his boots, he would appear to have hid the writings; thereby involving his style in greater obscurity. But his boots was at least pairs—and no two of his writings can put in any claim to be so regarded. Here follows (not to give more specimens) what was found in.

HIS BOOTS.

"Eh! well, then, Monsieur Mutuel! What do I know, what can I say? I assure you that he calls himself Monsieur The Englishman."

"Pardon. But I think it is impossible," said Monsieur Mutuel—a spectacled, snuffy, stooping old gentleman in carpet shoes and a cloth cap with a peaked shade, a loose blue frock-coat reaching to his heels, a large limp white shirt-frill, and cravat to correspond—that is to say, white was the natural color of his linen on Sundays, but it toned down with the week. "It is," repeated Monsieur Mutuel, his amiable old walnut-shell countenance very walnut-shelly indeed as he smiled and blinked in the bright morning sunlight—"it is, my cherished Madam Bouclet, I think, impossible!"

"Hey!" (with a little vexed cry and a great many tosses of her head.) "But it is not impossible that you are a pig!" retorted Madam Bouclet, a compact little woman of thirty-five or so. "See then—look there—read! 'On the second floor Monsieur L'Anglais.' Is it not so?"

"It is so," said Monsieur Mutuel.

"Good. Continue your morning walk. Get out!" Madam Bouclet dismissed him with a lively snap of her fingers.

The morning walk of Monsieur Mutuel was in the brightest patch that the sun made in the Grande Place of a dull old fortified French town. The manner of his morning walk was with his hands crossed behind him; an umbrella, in figure the express image of himself, always in one hand; a snuff-box in the other. Thus, with the shuffling gait of the elephant (who really does deal with the very worst trousers maker employed by the zoölogical world, and who appeared to have recommended him to Monsieur Mutuel), the old gentleman sunned himself daily when the sun was to be had—of course, at the same time sunning a red ribbon at his button-hole; for was he not an ancient Frenchman?

Being told by one of the angelic sex to continue his morning walk and get out, Monsieur Mutuel laughed a walnut-shell laugh, pulled off his cap at arm's length with the hand that contained his snuff-box, kept it off for a considerable period after he had parted from Madam Bouclet, and continued his morning walk and got out, like a man of gallantry as he was.

The documentary evidence to which Madam Bouclet had referred Monsieur Mutuel was the list of her lodgers, sweetly written forth by her own nephew and book-keeper, who held the pen of an angel, and posted up at the side of her gateway, for the information of the police. "Au second, M. L'Anglais, proprietaire." On the second floor, Mr. The Englishman, man of property. So it stood; nothing could be plainer.

Madam Bouclet now traced the line with her forefinger, as it were to confirm and settle herself in her parting snap at Monsieur Mutuel, and so placing her right hand on her hip with a defiant air, as if nothing should ever tempt her to unsnap that snap, strolled out into the place to glance up at the windows of Mr. The Englishman. That worthy happening to be looking out of window at the moment, Madam Bouclet gave him a graceful salutation with her head, looked to the right and looked to the left to account to him for her being there, considered for a moment, like one who accounted to herself for somebody she had expected not being there, and reëntered her own gateway. Madam Bouclet let all her house giving on the place in furnished flats or floors, and lived up the yard behind, in company with Monsieur Bouclet her husband (great at billiards), an inherited brewing business, several fowls, two carts, a nephew, a little dog in a big kennel, a grape-vine, a counting-house, four horses, a married sister (with a share in the brewing business), the husband and two children of the married sister, a parrot, a drum (performed on by the little boy of the married sister), two billeted soldiers, a quantity of pigeons, a fife (played by the nephew in a ravishing manner), several domestics and supernumeraries, a perpetual flavor of coffee and soup, a terrific range of artificial rocks and wooden precipices at least four feet high, a small fountain, and half a dozen large sunflowers.

Now, the Englishman, in taking his apartment—or as one might say on our side of the Channel, his set of chambers—had given his name, correct to the letter, Langley. But as he had a British way of not opening his mouth very wide on foreign soil, except at meals, the brewery had been able to make nothing of it but L'Anglais. So Mr. The Englishman he had become and he remained.

"Never saw such a people!" muttered Mr. The Englishman as he now looked out of window. "Never did in my life!"

This was true enough, for he had never before been out of his own country—a right little island, a tight little island, a bright little island, a show-fight little island, and full of merit of all sorts; but not the whole round world.

"These chaps," said Mr. The Englishman to himself as his eye rolled over the place, sprinkled with military here and there, "are no more like soldiers——" Nothing being sufficiently strong for the end of his sentence, he left it unended.

This again (from the point of view of his experience) was strictly correct; for though there was a great agglomeration of soldiers in the town and neighboring country, you might have held a grand review and field day of them every one, and looked in vain among them all for a soldier choking behind his foolish stock, or a soldier lamed by his ill-fitting shoes, or a soldier deprived of the use of his limbs by straps and buttons, or a soldier elaborately forced to be self-helpless in all the small affairs of life. A swarm of brisk, bright, active, bustling, handy, odd, skirmishing fellows, able to turn to cleverly at anything, from a siege to soup, from great guns to needles and thread, from the broadsword exercise to slicing an onion, from making war to making omelets, was all you would have found.

What a swarm! From the great place under the eye of Mr. The Englishman, where a few awkward squads from the last conscription were doing the goose-step—some members of those squads still, as to their bodies, in the chrysalis peasant-state of blouse, and only military butterflies as to their regimentally clothed legs—from the great place, away outside the fortifications, and away for miles along the dusty roads, soldiers swarmed. All day long, upon the grass-grown ramparts of the town, practicing soldiers trumpeted and bugled; all day long, down in angles of dry trenches, practicing soldiers drummed and drummed. Every forenoon soldiers burst out of the great barracks into the sandy gymnasium-ground hard by, and flew over the wooden horse, and hung on to flying ropes, and dangled upside down between parallel bars, and shot themselves off wooden platforms—splashes, sparks, coruscations, showers of soldiers. At every corner of the town wall, every guard-house, every gateway, every sentry-box, every drawbridge, every reedy ditch and rushy dike, soldiers, soldiers, soldiers. And the town being pretty well all wall, guard-house, gateway, sentry-box, drawbridge, reedy ditch, and rushy dike, the town was pretty well all soldiers.

What would the sleepy old town have been without the soldiers, seeing that even with them it had so overslept itself as to have slept its echoes hoarse, its defensive bars and locks and bolts and chains all rusty, and its ditches stagnant! From the days when Vauban engineered it to that perplexing extent that to look at it was like being knocked on the head with it, the stranger becoming stunned and stertorous under the shock of its incomprehensibility—from the days when Vauban made it the express incorporation of every substantive and adjective in the art of military engineering, and not only twisted you into it and twisted you out of it, to the right, to the left, opposite, under here, over there, in the dark, in the dirt, by gateway, archway, covered way, dry way, wet way, fosse, portcullis, drawbridge, sluice, squat tower, pierced wall, and heavy battery, but likewise took a fortifying dive under the neighboring country, and came to the surface three or four miles off, blowing out incomprehensible mounds and batteries among the quiet crops of chicory and beet-root—from those days to these the town had been asleep, and dust and rust and must had settled on its drowsy arsenals and magazines, and grass had grown up in its silent streets.

On market-days alone, its great place suddenly leaped out of bed. On market-days, some friendly enchanter struck his staff upon the stones of the great place, and instantly arose the liveliest booths and stalls and sittings and standings, and a pleasant hum of chaffering and huckstering from many hundreds of tongues, and a pleasant, though peculiar, blending of colors—white caps, blue blouses, and green vegetables—and at last the knight destined for the adventure seemed to have come in earnest, and all the Vaubanois sprang up awake. And now, by long, low-lying avenues of trees, jolting in white-hooded donkey-cart, and on donkey-back, and in tumbril and wagon and cart and cabriolet and afoot with barrow and burden—and along the dikes and ditches and canals, in little peak-prowed country boats—came peasant men and women in flocks and crowds, bringing articles for sale. And here you had boots and shoes, and sweatmeats, and stuffs to wear, and here (in the cool shade of the town hall) you had milk and cream and butter and cheese, and here you had fruits and onions and carrots, and all things needful for your soup, and here you had poultry and flowers and protesting pigs, and here new shovels, axes, spades, and bill-hooks for your farming work, and here huge mounds of bread, and here your unground grain in sacks, and here your children's dolls, and here the cake-seller, announcing his wares by beat and roll of drum. And hark! fanfaronade of trumpets, and here into the great place, resplendent in an open carriage, with four gorgeously attired servitors up behind, playing horns, drums, and cymbals, rolled "the daughter of a physician" in massive golden chains and ear-rings, and blue-feathered hat, shaded from the admiring sun by two immense umbrellas of artificial roses, to dispense (from motives of philanthropy) that small and pleasant dose which had cured so many thousands! Toothache, earache, headache, heartache, stomach-ache, debility, nervousness, fits, fainting, fever, ague, all equally cured by the small and pleasant dose of the great physician's great daughter!

The process was this—she, the daughter of a physician, proprietress of the superb equipage you now admired with its confirmatory blasts of trumpet, drum, and cymbal, told you so: On the first day after taking the small and pleasant dose, you would feel no particular influence beyond a most harmonious sensation of indescribable and irresistible joy; on the second day you would be so astonishingly better that you would think yourself changed into somebody else; on the third day you would be entirely free from your disorder, whatever its nature and however long you had had it, and would seek out the physician's daughter to throw yourself at her feet, kiss the hem of her garment, and buy as many more of the small and pleasant doses as by the sale of all your few effects you could obtain; but she would be inaccessible—gone for herbs to the Pyramids of Egypt—and you would be (though cured) reduced to despair! Thus would the physician's daughter drive her trade (and briskly too), and thus would the buying and selling and mingling of tongues and colors continue, until the changing sunlight, leaving the physician's daughter in the shadow of high roofs, admonished her to jolt out westward, with a departing effect of gleam and glitter on the splendid equipage and brazen blast. And now the enchanter struck his staff upon the stones of the great place once more and down went the booths, the sittings and standings, and vanished the merchandise, and with it the barrows, donkeys, donkey-carts, and tumbrils, and all other things on wheels and feet, except the slow scavengers with unwieldy carts and meager horses, clearing up the rubbish, assisted by the sleek town pigeons, better plumped out than on non-market-days. While there was yet an hour or two to wane before the autumn sunset, the loiterer outside town gate and drawbridge and postern and double-ditch would see the last white-hooded cart lessening in the avenue of lengthening shadows of trees, or the last country boat paddled by the last market-woman on her way home, showing black upon the reddening long, low, narrow dike between him and the mill; and as the paddle-parted scum and weed closed over the boat's track he might be comfortably sure that its sluggish rest would be troubled no more until next market-day.

As it was not one of the great place's days for getting out of bed when Mr. The Englishman looked down at the young soldiers practicing the goose-step there, his mind was left at liberty to take a military turn.

"These fellows are billeted everywhere about," said he; "and to see them lighting the people's fires, boiling the people's pots, minding the people's babies, rocking the people's cradles, washing the people's greens, and making themselves generally useful, in every sort of unmilitary way, is most ridiculous! Never saw such a set of fellows —never did in my life!"

All perfectly true again. Was there not Private Valentine, in that very house, acting as sole housemaid, valet. cook, steward, and nurse in the family of his captain, Monsieur le Captaine De la Cour—cleaning the floors, making the beds, doing the marketing, dressing the captain, dressing the dinners, dressing the salads, and dressing the baby, all with equal readiness? Or, to put him aside, he being in loyal attendance on his chief, was there not Private Hyppolite, billeted at the perfumer's two hundred yards off, who, when not on duty, volunteered to keep shop while the fair perfumeress stepped out to speak to a neighbor or so, and laughingly sold soap with his war sword girded on him? Was there not Emile, billeted at the clock-maker's, perpetually turning to of an evening with his coat off, winding up the stock? Was there not Eugene, billeted at the tinman's, cultivating, pipe in mouth, a garden four feet square, for the tinman, in the little court behind the shop, and extorting the fruits of the earth from the same, on his knees, with the sweat on his brow? Not to multiply examples, was there not Baptiste, billeted on the poor water-carrier, at that very instant sitting on the pavement in the sunlight, with his martial legs asunder, and one of the water-carrier's spare pails between them, which (to the delight and glory of the heart of the water-carrier coming across the place from the fountain yoked and burdened) he was painting bright green outside and bright red within? Or, to go no further than the barber's at the very next door, was there not Corporal Théophile——

"No," said Mr. The Englishman, glancing down at the barber's, "he is not there at present. There's the child, though."

A mere mite of a girl stood on the steps of the barber's shop, looking across the place. A mere baby, one might call her, dressed in the close white linen cap which small French country children wear (like the children in Dutch pictures), and in a frock of homespun blue, that had no shape except where it was tied round her little fat throat. So that, being naturally short and round all over, she looked, behind, as if she had been cut off at her natural waist, and had had her head neatly fitted on it.

"There's the child, though."

To judge from the way in which the dimpled hand was rubbing the eyes, the eyes had been closed in a nap and were newly opened. But they seemed to be looking so intently across the place that the Englishman looked in the same direction.

"Oh!" said he presently. "I thought as much. The corporal's there."

The corporal, a smart figure of a man of thirty, perhaps a thought under the middle size, but very neatly made—a sunburnt corporal with a brown peaked beard—faced about at the moment, addressing voluble words of instruction to the squad in hand. Nothing was amiss or awry about the corporal. A lithe and nimble corporal, quite complete, from the sparkling dark eyes under his knowing uniform cap to his sparkling white gaiters. The very image and presentment of a corporal of his country's army, in the line of his shoulders, the line of his waist, the broadest line of his bloomer trousers, and their narrowest line at the calf of his leg.

Mr. The Englishman looked on, and the child looked on, and the corporal looked on (but the last-named at his men), until the drill ended a few minutes afterward, and the military sprinkling dried up directly and was gone. Then said Mr. The Englishman to himself, "Look here! By George!" And the corporal, dancing toward the barber's with his arms wide open, caught up the child, held her over his head in a flying attitude, caught her down again, kissed her, and made off with her into the barber's house.

Now, Mr. The Englishman had had a quarrel with his erring and disobedient and disowned daughter, and there was a child in that case too. Had not his daughter been a child, and had she not taken angel-flights above his head as this child had flown above the corporal's?

"He's a"—national participled—"fool!" said the Englishman, and shut his window.

But the windows of the house of memory, and the windows of the house of mercy, are not so easily closed as windows of glass and wood! They fly open unexpectedly; they rattle in the night; they must be nailed up. Mr. The Englishman had tried nailing them, but had not driven the nails quite home. So he passed but a disturbed evening and a worse night.

By nature a good-tempered man? No; very little gentleness, confounding the quality with weakness. Fierce and wrathful when crossed? Very, and stupendously unreasonable. Moody? Exceedingly so. Vindictive? Well, he had had scowling thoughts that he would formally curse his daughter, as he had seen it done on the stage. But remembering that the real heaven is some paces removed from the mock one in the great chandelier of the theater, he had given that up.

And he had come abroad to be rid of his repudiated daughter for the rest of his life. And here he was.

At bottom, it was for this reason, more than for any other, that Mr. The Englishman took it extremely ill that Corporal Théophile should be so devoted to little Bebelle, the child at the barber's shop. In an unlucky moment he had chanced to say to himself, "Why, confound the fellow, he is not her father!" There was a sharp sting in the speech, which ran into him suddenly and put him in a worse mood. So he had national participled the unconscious corporal with most hearty emphasis, and had made up his mind to think no more about such a mountebank.

But it came to pass that the corporal was not to be dismissed. If he had known the most delicate fibers of the Englishman's mind, instead of knowing nothing on earth about him, and if he had been the most obstinate corporal in the grand army of France, instead of being the most obliging, he could not have planted himself with more determined immovability plump in the midst of all the Englishman's thoughts. Not only so, but he seemed to be always in his view. Mr. The Englishman had but to look out of window to look upon the corporal with little Bebelle. He had but to go for a walk, and there was the corporal walking with Bebelle. He had but to come home again, disgusted, and the corporal and Bebelle were at home before him. If he looked out at his back windows early in the morning, the corporal was in the barber's back yard, washing and dressing and brushing Bebelle. If he took refuge at his front windows, the corporal brought his breakfast out into the place, and shared it there with Bebelle. Always corporal and always Bebelle. Never corporal without Bebelle. Never Bebelle without corporal.

Mr. The Englishman was not particularly strong in the French language as a means of oral communication, though he read it very well. It is with languages as with people—when you only know them by sight, you are apt to mistake them; you must be on speaking terms before you can be said to have established an acquaintance.

For this reason, Mr. The Englishman had to gird up his loins considerably before he could bring himself to the point of exchanging ideas with Madam Bouclet on the subject of this corporal and this Bebelle. But Madam Bouclet looking in apologetically one morning to remark that O Heaven! she was in a state of desolation because the lamp-maker had not sent home that lamp confided to him to repair, but that truly he was a lamp-maker against whom the whole world shrieked out, Mr. The Englishman seized the occasion.

"Madam, that baby——"

"Pardon, monsieur. That lamp."

"No, no, that little girl."

"But, pardon!" said Madam Bouclet, angling for a clew, "one cannot light a little girl, or send her to be repaired?"

"The little girl—at the house of the barber."

"Ah-h-h!" cried Madam Bouclet, suddenly catching the idea with her delicate little line and rod. "Little Bebelle? Yes, yes, yes! And her friend the corporal? Yes, yes, yes, yes! So genteel of him—is it not?"

"He is not——"

"Not at all; not at all! He is not one of her relations. Not at all!"

"Why, then, he——"

"Perfectly!" cried Madam Bouclet; "you are right, monsieur. It is so genteel of him. The less relation, the more genteel. As you say."

"Is she——?"

"The child of the barber?" Madam Bouclet whisked up her skillful little line and rod again. "Not at all, not at all! She is the child of—in a word, of no one."

"The wife of the barber, then——"

"Indubitably. As you say. The wife of the barber receives a small stipend to take care of her. So much by the month. Eh, then! It is without doubt very little, for we are all poor here."

"You are not poor, madam."

"As to my lodgers," replied Madam Bouclet, with a smiling and a gracious bend of her head, "no. As to all things else, so-so."

"You flatter me, madam."

"Monsieur, it is you who flatter me in living here."

Certain fishy gasps on Mr. The Englishman's part denoting that he was about to resume his subject under difficulties, Madam Bouclet observed him closely and whisked up her delicate line and rod again with triumphant success.

"Oh, no, monsieur, certainly not. The wife of the barber is not cruel to the poor child, but she is careless. Her health is delicate and she sits all day looking out at window. Consequently when the corporal first came the poor little Bebelle was much neglected."

"It is a curious——" began Mr. The Englishman.

"Name? That Bebelle? Again you are right, monsieur. But it is a playful name for Gabrielle."

"And so the child is a mere fancy of the corporal's?" said Mr. The Englishman in a gruffly disparaging tone of voice.

"Eh, well!" returned Madam Bouclet with a pleading shrug; "one must love something. Human nature is weak."

"Devilish weak," muttered the Englishman in his own language.

"And the corporal," pursued Madam Bouclet, "being billeted at the barber's—where he will probably remain a long time, for he is attached to the general—and finding the poor unowned child in need of being loved, and finding himself in need of loving—why, there you have it all, you see!"

Mr. The Englishman accepted this interpretation of the matter with an indifferent grace, and observed to himself in an injured manner when he was again alone: "I shouldn't mind it so much, if these people were not such a"—national participled—"sentimental people!"

There was a cemetery outside the town, and it happened ill for the reputation of the Vaubanois, in this sentimental connection, that he took a walk there that same afternoon. To be sure there were some wonderful things in it (from the Englishman's point of view), and of a certainty in all Britain you would have found nothing like it. Not to mention the fanciful flourishes of hearts and crosses, in wood and iron, that were planted all over the place, making it look very like a firework ground, where a most splendid pyrotechnic display might be expected after dark, there were so many wreaths upon the graves, embroidered, as it might be, "To my mother," "To my daughter," "To my father," "To my brother," "To my sister," "To my friend," and those many wreaths were in so many stages of elaboration and decay, from the wreath of yesterday, all fresh color and bright beads, to the wreath of last year, a poor moldering wisp of straw! There were so many little gardens and grottos made upon graves, in so many tastes, with plants and shells and plaster figures and porcelain pitchers, and so many odds and ends! There were so many tributes of remembrance hanging up, not to be discriminated by the closest inspection from little round waiters, whereon were depicted in glowing hues either a lady or a gentleman, with a white pocket-handkerchief out of all proportion, leaning in a state of the most faultless mourning and most profound affliction on the most architectural and gorgeous urn! There were so many surviving wives who had put their names on the tombs of their deceased husbands, with a blank for the date of their own departure from this weary world; and there were so many surviving husbands who had rendered the same homage to their deceased wives; and out of the number there must have been so many who had long ago married again! In fine, there was so much in the place that would have seemed mere frippery to a stranger, save for the consideration that the lightest paper flower that lay upon the poorest heap of earth was never touched by a rude hand, but perished there, a sacred thing!

"Nothing of the solemnity of death here," Mr. The

Englishman had been going to say, when this last consideration touched him with a mild appeal, and on the whole he walked out without saying it. "But these people are," he insisted by way of compensation, when he was well outside the gate, "they are so"—participled—"sentimental!"

His way back lay by the military gymnasium ground. And there he passed the corporal glibly instructing young soldiers how to swing themselves over rapid and deep watercourses on their way to glory, by means of a rope, and himself deftly plunging off a platform and flying a hundred feet or two, as an encouragement to them to begin. And there he also passed, perched on a crowning eminence (probably by the corporal's careful hands), the small Bebelle, with her round eyes wide open, surveying the proceeding like a wondering sort of blue-and-white bird.

"If that child was to die," this was his reflection as he turned his back and went his way—"and it would almost serve the fellow right for making such a fool of himself—I suppose we should have him sticking up a wreath and a waiter in that fantastic burying-ground."

Nevertheless, after another early morning or two of looking out of window, he strolled down into the place, when the corporal and Bebelle were walking there, and touching his hat to the corporal (an immense achievement), wished him good-day.

"Good-day, monsieur."

"This is a rather pretty child you have here," said Mr. The Englishman, taking her chin in his hand and looking down into her astonished blue eyes.

"Monsieur, she is a very pretty child," returned the corporal, with a stress on his polite correction of the phrase.

"And good?" said the Englishman.

"And very good. Poor little thing!"

"Hah!" The Englishman stooped down and patted her cheek, not without awkwardness, as if he were going too far in his conciliation. "And what is this medal round your neck, my little one?"

Bebelle having no other reply on her lips than her chubby right fist, the corporal offered his services as interpreter.

"Monsieur demands, what is this, Bebelle?"

"It is the Holy Virgin," said Bebelle.

"And who gave it you?" asked the Englishman.

"Théophile."

"And who is Théophile?"

Bebelle broke into a laugh, laughed merrily and heartily, clapped her chubby hands, and beat her little feet on the stone pavement of the place.

"He doesn't know Théophile! Why, he doesn't know any one! He doesn't know anything!" Then, sensible of a small solecism in her manners, Bebelle twisted her right hand in a leg of the corporal's bloomer trousers, and, laying her cheek against the place, kissed it.

"Monsieur Théophile, I believe?" said the Englishman to the corporal.

"It is I, monsieur."

"Permit me." Mr. The Englishman shook him heartily by the hand and turned away. But he took it mighty ill that old Monsieur Mutuel in his patch of sunlight, upon whom he came as he turned, should pull off his cap to him with a look of pleased approval. And he muttered in his own tongue as he returned the salutation, "Well, walnut-shell! And what business is it of yours?"

Mr. The Englishman went on for many weeks passing but disturbed evenings and worse nights, and constantly experiencing that those aforesaid windows in the houses of memory and mercy rattled after dark, and that he had very imperfectly nailed them up. Likewise, he went on for many weeks daily improving the acquaintance of the corporal and Bebelle. That is to say, he took Bebelle by the chin, and the corporal by the hand, and offered Bebelle sous and the corporal cigars, and even got the length of changing pipes with the corporal and kissing Bebelle. But he did it all in a shamefaced way, and always took it extremely ill that Monsieur Mutuel in his patch of sunlight should note what he did. Whenever that seemed to be the case, he always growled in his own tongue, "There you are again, walnut-shell! What business is it of yours?"

In a word, it had become the occupation of Mr. The Englishman's life to look after the corporal and little Bebelle, and to resent old Monsieur Mutuel's looking after him—an occupation only varied by a fire in the town one windy night, and much passing of water-buckets from hand to hand (in which the Englishman rendered good service) and much beating of drums—when all of a sudden the corporal disappeared.

Next, all of a sudden, Bebelle disappeared.

She had been visible a few days later than the corporal —sadly deteriorated as to washing and brushing—but she had not spoken when addressed by Mr. The Englishman, and had looked scared and had run away. And now it would seem that she had run away for good. And there lay the great place under the windows, bare and barren.

In a shamefaced and constrained way, Mr. The Englishman asked no question of any one, but watched from his front windows, and watched from his back windows, and lingered about the place, and peeped in at the barber's shop, and did all this and much more with a whistling and tune-humming pretense of not missing anything, until one afternoon when Monsieur Mutuel's patch of sunlight was in the shadow, and when, according to all rule and precedent, he had no right whatever to bring his red ribbon out of doors, behold here he was, advancing with his cap already in his hand twelve paces off!

Mr. The Englishman had got as far into his usual objurgation as "What bu—si—" when he checked himself.

"Ah, it is sad, it is sad! Hélas, it is unhappy, it is sad!" Thus old Monsieur Mutuel, shaking his gray head.

"What busin—at least, I would say, what do you mean, Monsieur Mutuel?"

"Our corporal. Hélas, our dear corporal!"

"What has happened to him?"

"You have not heard?"

"No."

"At the fire. But he was so brave, so ready. Ah, too brave, too ready!"

"May the devil carry you away!" the Englishman broke in impatiently; "I beg your pardon—I mean me—I am not accustomed to speak French—go on, will you?"

"And a falling beam——"

"Good God!" exclaimed the Englishman. "It was a private soldier who was killed?"

"No. A corporal, the same corporal, our dear corporal. Beloved by all his comrades. The funeral ceremony was touching—penetrating. Monsieur The Englishman, your eyes fill with tears."

"What bu—si——"

"Monsieur The Englishman, I honor those emotions. I salute you with profound respect. I will not obtrude myself upon your noble heart."

Monsieur Mutuel—a gentleman in every thread of his cloudy linen, under whose wrinkled hand every grain in the quarter of an ounce of poor snuff in his poor little tin box became a gentleman's property—Monsieur Mutuel passed on with his cap in his hand.

"I little thought," said the Englishman, after walking for several minutes, and more than once blowing his nose, "when I was looking round that cemetery—I'll go there!"

Straight he went there, and when he came within the gate he paused, considering whether he should ask at the lodge for some direction to the grave. But he was less than ever in a mood for asking questions, and he thought, "I shall see something on it to know it by."

In search of the corporal's grave he went softly on, up this walk and down that, peering in among the crosses and hearts and columns and obelisks and tombstones for a recently disturbed spot. It troubled him now to think how many dead there were in the cemetery—he had not thought them a tenth part so numerous before—and after he had walked and sought for some time, he said to himself as he struck down a new vista of tombs, "I might suppose that every one was dead but I."

Not every one. A live child was lying on the ground asleep. Truly he had found something on the corporal's grave to know it by, and the something was Bebelle.

With such a loving will had the dead soldier's comrades worked at his resting-place that it was already a neat garden. On the green turf of the garden Bebelle lay sleeping, with her cheek touching it. A plain unpainted little wooden cross was planted in the turf, and her short arm embraced this little cross, as it had many a time embraced the corporal's neck. They had put a tiny flag (the flag of France) at his head, and a laurel garland.

Mr. The Englishman took off his hat and stood for awhile silent. Then, covering his head again, he bent down on one knee, and softly roused the child.

"Bebelle! My little one!"

Opening her eyes, on which the tears were still wet, Bebelle was at first frightened: but seeing who it was, she suffered him to take her in his arms, looking steadfastly at him.

"You must not lie here, my little one. You must come with me."

"No, no. I can't leave Théophile. I want the good dear Théophile."

"We will go and seek him, Bebelle. We will go and look for him in England. We will go and look for him at my daughter's, Bebelle."

"Shall we find him there?"

"We shall find the best part of him there. Come with me, poor forlorn little one. Heaven is my witness," said the Englishman in a low voice as before he rose he touched the turf above the gentle corporal's breast, "that I thankfully accept this trust!"

It was a long way for the child to have come unaided. She was soon asleep again with her embrace transferred to the Englishman's neck. He looked at her worn shoes, and her galled feet, and her tired face, and believed that she had come there every day.

He was leaving the grave with the slumbering Bebelle in his arms, when he stopped, looked wistfully down at it, and looked wistfully at the other graves around. "It is the innocent custom of the people," said Mr. The Englishman, with hesitation. "I think I should like to do it. No one sees."

Careful not to wake Bebelle as he went, he repaired to the lodge where such little tokens of remembrance were sold, and bought two wreaths. One, blue and white and glistening silver, "To my friend;" one of a sober red and black and yellow, "To my friend." With these he went back to the grave and so down on one knee again. Touching the child's lips with the brighter wreath, he guided her hand to hang it on the cross; then hung his own wreath there. After all the wreathes were not far out of keeping with the little garden. To my friend. To my friend.

Mr. The Englishman took it very ill when he looked round a street corner into the great place, carrying Bebelle in his arms, that old Mutuel should be there airing his red ribbon. He took a world of pains to dodge the worthy Mutuel, and devoted a surprising amount of time and trouble to skulking into his own lodging like a man pursued by justice. Safely arrived there at last, he made Bebelle's toilet with as accurate a remembrance as he could bring to bear upon that work of the way in which he had often seen the poor corporal make it, and, having given her to eat and drink, laid her down on his own bed. Then he slipped out into the barber's shop, and after a brief interview with the barber's wife, and a brief recourse to his purse and card-case, came back again with the whole of Bebelle's personal property in such a very little bundle that it was quite lost under his arm.

As it was irreconcilable with his whole course and character that he should carry Bebelle off in state, or receive any compliments or congratulations on that feat, he devoted the next day to getting his two portmanteaus out of the house by artfulness and stealth, and to comporting himself in every particular as if he were going to run away —except, indeed, that he paid his few debts in the town, and prepared a letter to leave for Madam Bouclet, inclosing a sufficient sum of money in lieu of notice. A railway train would come through at midnight, and by that train he would take away Bebelle to look for Théophile in England and at his forgiven daughter's.

At midnight, on a moonlight night, Mr. The Englishman came creeping forth like a harmless assassin, with Bebelle on his breast instead of a dagger. Quiet the great place, and quiet the never-stirring streets; closed the cafés; huddled together motionless their billiard balls; drowsy the guard or sentinel on duty here and there; lulled for the time, by sleep, even the insatiate appetite of the office of town dues.

Mr. The Englishman left the place behind, and left the streets behind, and left the civilian-inhabited town behind, and descended down among the military works of Vauban, hemming all in. As the shadow of the first heavy arch and postern fell upon him and was left behind, as the shadow of the second heavy arch and postern fell upon him and was left behind, as his hollow tramp over the first drawbridge was succeeded by a gentler sound, as his hollow tramp over the second drawbridge was succeeded by a gentler sound, as he overcame the stagnant ditches one by one, and passed out where the flowing waters were and where the moonlight, so the dark shades and the hollow sounds and the unwholesomely locked currents of his soul were vanquished and set free. See to it, Vaubans of your own hearts, who gird them in with triple walls and ditches, and with bolt and chain and bar and lifted bridge—raze those fortifications and lay them level with the all-absorbing dust before the night cometh when no hand can work!

All went prosperously, and he got into an empty carriage in the train, where he could lay Bebelle on the seat over against him, as on a couch, and cover her from head to foot with his mantle. He had just drawn himself up from perfecting this arrangement, and had just leaned back in his own seat contemplating it with great satisfaction, when he became aware of a curious appearance at the open carriage window—a ghostly little tin box floating up in the moonlight and hovering there.

He leaned forward and put out his head. Down among the rails and wheels and ashes, Monsieur Mutuel, red ribbon and all!

"Excuse me, Monsieur The Englishman," said Monsieur Mutuel, holding up his box at arm's length, the carriage being so high and he so low; "but I shall reverence the little box forever, if your so generous hand will take a pinch from it at parting."

Mr. The Englishman reached out of the window before complying, and—without asking the old fellow what business it was of his—shook hands and said, "Adieu! God bless you!"

"And, Mr. The Englishman, God bless you!" cried Madam Bouclet, who was also there among the rails and wheels and ashes. "And God will bless you in the happiness of the protected child now with you. And God will bless you in your own child at home. And God will bless you in your own remembrances. And this from me!"

He had barely time to catch a bouquet from her hand, when the train was flying through the night. Round the paper that infolded it was bravely written (doubtless by the nephew who held the pen of an angel), "Homage to the friend of the friendless."

"Not bad people, Bebelle!" said Mr. The Englishman, softly drawing the mantle a little from her sleeping face, that he might kiss it, "though they are so——"

Too "sentimental" himself at the moment to be able to get out that word, he adding nothing but a sob, and traveled for some miles, through the moonlight, with his hand before his eyes.

CHAPTER II.

HIS WONDERFUL END.

It will have been ere now perceived that I sold the foregoing writings. From the fact of their being printed in these pages, the inference will, ere now, have been drawn by the reader (may I add, the gentle reader?) that I sold them to one who never yet.*

Having parted with the writings on most satisfactory terms—for, in opening negotiations with the present journal, was I not placing myself in the hands of one of whom it may be said, in the words of another*—I resumed my usual functions. But I too soon discovered that peace of mind had fled from a brow which, up to that time, Time had merely took the hair off, leaving an unruffled expanse within.

It were superfluous to veil it—the brow to which I allude is my own.

Yes, over that brow uneasiness gathered like the sable wing of the fabled bird, as—as no doubt will be easily identified by all right-minded individuals. If not, I am unable, on the spur of the moment, to enter into particulars of him. The reflection that the writings must now inevitably get into print, and that he might yet live and meet with them, sat like the hag of night upon my jaded form. The elasticity of my spirits departed. Fruitless was the bottle, whether wine or medicine. I had recourse to both, and the effect of both upon my system was witheringly lowering.

In this state of depression, into which I subsided when I first began to revolve what could I ever say if he—the unknown—was to appear in the coffee-room and demand reparation, I one forenoon in this last November received a turn that appeared to be given me by the finger of fate and conscience hand in hand.

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* The remainder of this complimentary sentence editorially struck out.

"Mr. Christopher, the head waiter?"

"The same."

The young man shook his hair out of his vision—which it impeded—took a packet from his breast, and handing it over to me, said, with his eye (or did I dream?) fixed with a lambent meaning on me, "The proofs."

Although I smelled my coat-tails singeing at the fire, I had not the power to withdraw them. The young man put the packet in my faltering grasp, and repeated—let me do him the justice to add, with civility:

"The proofs. A. Y. R."

With those words he departed.

A. Y. R.? And you remember. Was that his meaning? At your risk. Were the letters short for that reminder? Anticipate your retribution. Did they stand for that warning? Outdacious youth, repent. But no; for that a O was happily wanting and the vowel here was a A.

I opened the packet, and found that its contents were the foregoing writings printed just as the reader (may I add, the discerning reader?) peruses them. In vain was the reassuring whisper—A. Y. R., all the year round—it could not cancel the proofs. Too appropriate name. The proofs of my having sold the writings.

My wretchedness daily increased. I had not thought of the risk I ran, and the defying publicity I put my head into, until all was done, and all was in print. Give up the money to be off the bargain and prevent the publication, I could not. My family was down in the world, Christmas was coming on, a brother in the hospital and a sister in the rheumatics could not be entirely neglected. And it was not only ins in the family that had told on the resources of one unaided waitering; outs were not wanting. A brother out of a situation, and another brother out of money to meet an acceptance, and another brother out of his mind, and another brother out at New York (not the same, though it might appear so), had really and truly brought me to a stand till I could turn myself round. I got worse and worse in my meditations, constantly reflecting "the proofs," and reflecting that when Christmas drew nearer, and the proofs were published, there could be no safety from hour to hour but that he might confront me in the coffee-room, and in the face of day and his country demand his rights.

The impressive and unlooked-for catastrophe toward which I dimly pointed the reader (shall I add, the highly intellectual reader?) in my first remarks now rapidly approaches.

It was November still, but the last echoes of the Guy Foxes had long ceased to reverberate. We was slack—several joints under our average mark, and wine, of course, proportionate. So slack had we become at last that beds Nos. 26, 27, 28, and 31, having took their six-o'clock dinners, and dozed over their respective pints, had drove away in their respective hansoms for their respective night mail-trains, and left us empty.

I had took the evening paper to No. 6 table—which is warm and most to be preferred—and, lost in the all-absorbing topics of the day, had dropped into a slumber I was recalled to consciousness by the well-known intimation, "Waiter!" and replying, "Sir!" found a gentleman standing at No. 4 table. The reader (shall I add, the observant reader?) will please to notice the locality of the gentleman—at No. 4 table.

He had one of the new-fangled uncollapsable bags in his hand (which I am against, for I don't see why you shouldn't collapse, while you are about it, as your fathers collapsed before you), and he said:

"I want to dine, waiter. I shall sleep here to-night."

"Very good, sir. What will you take for dinner, sir?"

"Soup, bit of codfish, oyster sauce, and the joint."

"Thank you, sir."

I rang the chambermaid's bell; and Mrs. Pratchett walked in, according to custom, demurely carrying a lighted flat candle before her, as if she was one of a long public procession, all the other members of which was invisible.

In the mean while the gentleman had gone up to the mantel-piece, right in front of the fire, and had laid his forehead against the mantel-piece (which it is a low one, and brought him into the attitude of leap-frog), and had heaved a tremendous sigh. His hair was long and lightish; and when he laid his forehead against the mantelpiece, his hair all fell in a dusty fluff together over his eyes; and when he now turned round, and lifted up his head again, it all fell in a dusty fluff together over his ears. This gave him a wild appearance, similar to a blasted heath.

"Oh! The chambermaid. Ah!" He was turning something in his mind. "To be sure. Yes. I won't go upstairs now, if you will take my bag. It will be enough for the present to know my number. Can you give me 24 B?"

(O conscience, what a adder art thou!)

Mrs. Pratchett allotted him the room, and took his bag to it. He then went back before the fire, and fell a-biting his nails.

"Waiter!" biting between the words, "give me," bite, "pen and paper; and in five minutes," bite, "let me have, if you please," bite, "a," bite, "messenger."

Unmindful of his waning soup, he wrote and sent off six notes before he touched his dinner. Three were City; three West End. The City letters were to Cornhill, Ludgate Hill, and Farringdon Street. The West End letters were to Great Marlborough Street, New Burlington Street, and Piccadilly. Everybody was systematically denied at every one of the six places, and there was not a vestige of any answer. Our light porter whispered to me, when he came back with that report, "All booksellers."

But before then he had cleared off his dinner and his bottle of wine. He now—mark the concurrence with the document formerly given in full!—knocked a plate of biscuits off the table with his agitated elber (but without breakage), and demanded boiling brandy-and-water.

Now fully convinced that it was himself, I perspired with the utmost freedom. When he became flushed with the heated stimulant referred to, he again demanded pen and paper, and passed the succeeding two hours in producing a manuscript which he put in the fire when completed. He then went up to bed, attended by Mrs. Pratchett. Mrs. Pratchett (who was aware of my emotions) told me, on coming down, that she had noticed his eye rolling into every corner of the passages and staircase, as if in search of his luggage, and that, looking back as she shut the door of 24 B, she perceived him with his coat already thrown off immersing himself bodily under the bedstead, like a chimney-sweep before the application of machinery.

The next day—I forbear the horrors of that night—was a very foggy day in our part of London, insomuch that it was necessary to light the coffee-room gas. We was still alone, and no feverish words of mine can do justice to the fitfulness of his appearance as he sat at No. 4 table, increased by there being something wrong with the meter.

Having again ordered his dinner, he went out, and was out for the best part of two hours. Inquiring on his return whether any of the answers had arrived, and receiving an unqualified negative, his instant call was for mulligatawny, the cayenne pepper, and orange brandy.

Feeling that the mortal struggle was now at hand, I also felt that I must be equal to him, and with that view resolved that whatever he took I would take. Behind my partition, but keeping my eye on him over the curtain, I therefore operated on mulligatawny, cayenne pepper, and orange brandy. And at a later period of the day, when he again said, "Orange brandy," I said so, too, in a lower tone to George, my second lieutenant (my first was absent on leave), who acts between me and the bar.

Throughout that awful day he walked about the coffee-room continually. Often he came close up to my partition, and then his eyes rolled within, too evidently in search of any signs of his luggage. Half-past six came, and I laid his cloth. He ordered a bottle of Old Brown. I likewise ordered a bottle of Old Brown. He drank his. I drank mine (as nearly as my duties would permit) glass for glass against his. He topped with coffee and a small glass. I topped with coffee and a small glass. He dozed. I dozed. At last, "Waiter!"—and he ordered his bill. The moment was now at hand when we two must be locked in the deadly grapple.

Swift as the arrow from the bow, I had formed my resolution; in other words, I had hammered it out between nine and nine. It was, that I would be the first to open up the subject with a full acknowledgment and would offer any gradual settlement within my power. He paid his bill (doing what was right by attendance) with his eyes rolling about him to the last for any tokens of his luggage. One only time our gaze then met, with the lustrous fixedness (I believe I am correct in imputing that character to it?) of the well-known basilisk. The decisive moment had arrived.

With a tolerable steady hand, though with humility, I laid the proofs before him.

"Gracious heavens!" he cries out, leaping up and catching hold of his hair. "What's this? Print!"

"Sir," I replied in a calming voice, and bending forward, "I humbly acknowledge to being the unfortunate cause of it. But I hope, sir, that when you have heard the circumstances explained, and the innocence of my intentions——"

To my amazement, I was stopped short by his catching me in both his arms and pressing me to his breast-bone; where I must confess to my face (and particular, nose) having undergone some temporary vexation from his wearing his coat buttoned high up, and his buttons being uncommon hard.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he cries, releasing me with a wild laugh and grasping my hand. "What is your name, my benefactor?"

"My name, sir" (I was crumpled and puzzled to make him out), "is Christopher; and I hope, sir, that, as such, when you've heard my ex——"

"In print!" he exclaims again, dashing the proofs over and over as if he was bathing in them. "In print! Oh, Christopher! Philanthropist! Nothing can recompense you—but what sum of money would be acceptable to you?"

I had drawn a step back from him, or I should have suffered from his buttons again.

"Sir, I assure you I have been already well paid, and——"

"No, no, Christopher! Don't talk like that! What sum of money would be acceptable to you, Christopher? Would you find £20 acceptable, Christopher?"

However great my surprise, I naturally found words to say, "Sir, I am not aware that the man was ever yet born without more than the average amount of water on the brain as would not find £20 acceptable. But—extremely obliged to you, sir, I'm sure;" for he had tumbled it out of his purse and crammed it in my hand in two bank-notes; "but I could wish to know, sir, if not intruding, how I have merited this liberality?"

"Know, then, my Christopher," he says, "tha from boyhood's hour I have unremittingly and unavailingly endeavored to get into print. Know, Christopher, that all the booksellers alive—and several dead—have refused to put me into print. Know, Christopher, that I have written unprinted reams. But they shall be read to you, my friend and brother. You sometimes have a holiday?"

Seeing the great danger I was in, I had the presence of mind to answer: "Never!" To make it more final, I added: "Never! Not from the cradle to the grave."

"Well," says he, thinking no more about that and chuckling at his proofs again. "But I am in print! The first flight of ambition emanating from my father's lowly cot is realized at length! The golden bow"—he was geting on—"struck by the magic hand, has emitted a complete and perfect sound! When did this happen, my Christopher?"

"Which happen, sir?"

"This"—he held it out at arm's length to admire it—"this per-rint."

When I had given him my detailed account of it, he grasped me by the hand again and said:

"Dear Christopher, it should be gratifying to you to know that you are an instrument in the hands of destiny. Because you are."

A passing something of a melancholy cast put it into my head to shake it, and to say, "Perhaps we all are."

"I don't mean that," he answered: "I don't take that wide range; I confine myself to the special case. Observe me well, my Christopher! Hopeless of getting rid, through any effort of my own, of any of the manuscripts among my luggage—all of which, send them where I would, were always coming back to me—it is now some seven years since I left that luggage here, on the desperate chance, either that the too faithful manuscripts would come back to me no more or that some one less accursed than I might give them to the world. You follow me, my Christopher?"

"Pretty well, sir." I followed him so far as to judge that he had a weak head, and that the orange, the boiling, and Old Brown combined was beginning to tell. (The Old Brown, being heady, is best adapted to seasoned cases.)

"Years elapsed, and those compositions slumbered in dust. At length, destiny, choosing her agent from all mankind, sent you here, Christopher, and lo! the casket was burst asunder, and the giant was free!"

He made hay of his hair after he said this, and he stood a-tiptoe.

"But," he reminded himself in a state of great excitement, "we must sit up all night, my Christopher. I must correct these proofs for the press. Fill all the inkstands, and bring me several new pens."

He smeared himself and he smeared the proofs, the night through, to that degree that when Sol give him warning to depart (in a four-wheeler), few could have said which was them, and which was him, and which was blots. His last instructions was that I should instantly run and take his corrections to the office of the present journal. I did so. They most likely will not appear in print, for I noticed a message being brought round from Beauford Printing House, while I was a throwing this concluding statement on paper, that the ole resources of that establishment was unable to make out what they meant. Upon which a certain gentleman in company, as I will not more particularly name—but of whom it will be sufficient to remark, standing on the broad basis of a wave-girt isle, that whether we regard him in the light of*—laughed and put the corrections in the fire.

*** The remainder of this complimentary parenthesis editorially struck out.**

MRS. LIRRIPER'S LODGINGS.

IN TWO CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

HOW MRS. LIRRIPER CARRIED ON THE BUSINESS.

Whoever would begin to be worried with letting lodgings that wasn't a lone woman with a living to get is a thing inconceivable to me my dear, excuse the familiarity but it comes natural to me in my own little room when wishing to open my mind to those that I can trust and I should be truly thankful if they were all mankind but such is not so, for have but a furnished bill in the window and your watch on the mantel-piece and farewell to it if you turn your back for but a second however gentlemanly the manners, nor is being of your own sex any safeguard as I have reason in the form of sugar-tongs to know, for that lady (and a fine woman she was) got me to run for a glass of water on the plea of going to be confined, which certainly turned out true but it was in the station-house.

No. 81 Norfolk Street Strand—situated midway between the City and St. James' and within five minutes walk of the principal places of public amusement—is my address. I have rented this house many years as the parish rate-books will testify and I could wish my landlord was as alive to the fact as I am myself, but no bless you not a half a pound of paint to save his life nor so much my dear as a tile upon the roof though on your bended knees.

My dear you never have found No. 81 Norfolk Street Strand advertised in Bradshaw's Railway Guide and with the blessing of Heaven you never will or shall so find it.

Some there are who do not think it lowering themselves to make their names that cheap and even going the lengths of a portrait of the house not like it with a blot in every window and a coach and four at the door, but what will suit Wozenham's lower down on the other side of the way will not suit me, Miss Wozenham having her opinions and me having mine, though when it comes to systematic underbidding capable of being proved on oath in a court of justice and taking the form of "If Mrs. Lirriper names 18 shillings a week, I name 15 and 6" it then comes to a settlement between yourself and your conscience supposing for the sake of argument your name to be Wozenham which I am well aware it is not or my opinion of you would be greatly lowered, and as to airy bedrooms and a night-porter in constant attendance the less said the better, the bedrooms being stuffy and the porter stuff.

It is forty years ago since me and my poor Lirriper got married at St. Clement's Danes where I now have a sitting in a very pleasant pew with genteel company and my own hassock and being partial to evening service not too crowded. My poor Lirriper was a handsome figure of a man with a beaming eye and a voice as mellow as a musical instrument made of honey and steel, but he had ever been a free liver being in the commercial traveling line and traveling what he called a limekiln road—"a dry road, Emma my dear," my poor Lirriper says to me "where I have to lay the dust with one drink on another all day long and half the night, and it wears me Emma"—and this led to his running through a good deal and might have run through the turnpike too when that dreadful horse that never would stand still for a single instant set off, but for its being night and the gate shut and consequently took his wheel my poor Lirriper and the gig smashed to atoms and never spoke afterward. He was a handsome figure of a man and a man with a jovial heart and a sweet temper, but if they had come up then they never could have given you the mellowness of his voice, and indeed I consider photographs wanting in mellowness as a general rule and making you look like a new-plowed field.

My poor Lirriper being behindhand with the world and being buried at Hatfield church in Hertfordshire, not that it was his native place but that he had a liking for the Salisbury Arms where we went upon our wedding-day and passed as happy a fortnight as ever happy was, I went round to the creditors and I says "Gentlemen I am acquainted with the fact that I am not answerable for my late husband's debts but I wish to pay them for I am his lawful wife and his good name is dear to me. I am going into the lodgings gentlemen as a business and if I prosper every farthing that my late husband owed shall be paid for the sake of the love I bore him, by this right hand." It took a long time to do but it was done, and the silver cream-jug which is between ourselves and the bed and the mattress in my room upstairs (or it would have found legs so sure as ever the furnished bill was up) being presented by the gentlemen engraved "To Mrs. Lirriper a mark of grateful respect for her honorable conduct" gave me a turn which was too much for my feelings, till Mr. Betely which at that time had the parlors and loved his joke says "Cheer up Mrs. Lirriper, you should feel as if it was only your christening and they were your godfathers and godmothers which did promise for you." And it brought me round, and I don't mind confessing to you my dear that I then put a sandwich and a drop of sherry in a little basket and went down to Hatfield churchyard outside the coach and kissed my hand and laid it with a kind of a proud and swelling love on my husband's grave, though bless you it had taken me so long to clear his name that my wedding-ring was worn quite fine and smooth when I laid it on the green green waving grass.

I am an old woman now and my good looks are gone but that's me my dear over the plate-warmer and considered like in the times when you used to pay two guineas on ivory and took your chance pretty much how you came out, which made you very careful how you left it about afterward because people were turned so red and uncomfortable by mostly guessing it was somebody else quite different, and there was once a certain person that had put his money in a hop business that came in one morning to pay his rent and his respects being the second floor that would have taken it down from its hook and put it in his breast-pocket—you understand my dear—for the L, he says, of the original—only there was no mellowness in his voice and I wouldn't let him, but his opinion of it you may gather from his saying to it "Speak to me Emma!" which was far from a rational observation of doubt but still a tribute to its being a likeness, and I think myself it was like me when I was young and wore that sort of stays.

But it was about the lodgings that I was intending to hold forth and certainly I ought to know something of the business having been in it so long, for it was early in the second year of my married life that I lost my poor Lirriper and I set up at Islington directly afterward and afterward came here, being two houses and thirty-eight years and some losses and a deal of experience.

Girls are your first trial after fixtures and they try you even worse than what I call the wandering Christians, though why they should roam the earth looking for bills and then coming in and viewing the apartments and stickling about terms and never at all wanting them or dreaming of taking them being already provided, is a mystery I should be thankful to have explained if by any miracle it could be. It's wonderful they live so long and thrive so on it but I suppose the exercise makes it healthy, knocking so much and going from house to house and up and down stairs all day, and then their pretending to be so particular and punctual is a most astonishing thing, looking at their watches and saying "Could you give me the refusal of the rooms till twenty minutes past eleven the day after to-morrow in the forenoon, and supposing it to be considered essential by my friend from the country could there be a small iron bedstead put in the little room upon the stairs?" Why when I was new to it my dear I used to consider before I promised and to make my mind anxious with calculations and to get quite wearied out with disappointments, but now I says "Certainly by all means" well knowing it's a wandering Christian and I shall hear no more about it, indeed by this time I know most of the wandering Christians by sight as well as they know me, it being the habit of each individual revolving round London in that capacity to come back about twice a year, and it's very remarkable that it runs in families and the children grow up to it, but even were it otherwise I should no sooner hear of the friend from the country which is a certain sign than I should nod and say to myself you're a wandering Christian, though whether they are (as I have heard) persons of small property with a taste for regular employment and frequent change of scene I cannot undertake to tell you.

Girls as I was beginning to remark are one of your first and your lasting troubles, being like your teeth which begin with convulsions and never cease tormenting you from the time you cut them till they cut you, and then you don't want to part with them which seems hard but we must all succumb or buy artificial, and even where you get a will nine times out of ten you'll get a dirty face with it and naturally lodgers do not like good society to be shown in with a smear of black across the nose or a smudgy eyebrow. Where they pick the black up is a mystery I cannot solve, as in the case of the willingest girl that ever came into a house half-starved poor thing, a girl so willing that I called her Willing Sophy down upon her knees scrubbing early and late and ever cheerful but always smiling with a black face. And I says to Sophy "Now Sophy my good girl have a regular day for your stoves and keep the width of the airy between yourself and the blacking and do not brush your hair with the bottoms of the saucepans and do not meddle with the snuffs of the candles and it stands to reason that it can no longer be" yet there it was and always on her nose, which turning up and being broad at the end seemed to boast of it and caused warning from a steady gentleman and excellent lodger with breakfast by the week but a little irritable and use of a sitting-room when required, his words being "Mrs. Lirriper I have arrived at the point of admitting that the black is a man and a brother, but only in a natural form and when it can't be got off." Well consequently I put poor Sophy on to other work and forbid her answering the door or answering a bell on any account but she was so unfortunately willing that nothing would stop her flying up the kitchen stairs whenever a bell was heard to tingle. I put it to her "O Sophy Sophy for goodness' goodness' sake where does it come from?" To which that poor unlucky willing mortal bursting out crying to see me so vexed replied "I took a deal of black into me ma'am when I was a small child being much neglected and I think it must be, that it works out," so it continuing to work out of that poor thing and not having another fault to find with her I says "Sophy what do you seriously think of my helping you away to New South Wales where it might not be noticed?" Nor did I ever repent the money which was well spent, for she married the ship's cook on the voyage (himself a mulotter) and did well and lived happy, and so far as ever I heard it was not noticed in a new state of society to her dying day.

In what way Miss Wozenham lower down on the other side of the way reconciled it to her feelings as a lady (which she is not) to entice Mary Anne Perkinsop from my service is best known to herself, I do not know and I do not wish to know how opinions are formed at Wozenham's on any point. But Mary Anne Perkinsop although I behaved handsomely to her and she behaved unhandsomely to me was worth her weight in gold as overawing lodgers without driving them away, for lodgers would be far more sparing of their bells with Mary Anne than I ever knew them be with maid or mistress, which is a great triumph especially when accompanied with a cast in the eye and a bag of bones, but it was the steadiness of her way with them through her father's having failed in pork. It was Mary Anne's looking so respectable in her person and being so strict in her spirits that conquered the tea-and-sugarest gentleman (for he weighed them both in a pair of scales every morning) that I have ever had to deal with and no lamb grew meeker, still it afterwards came round to me that Miss Wozenham happening to pass and seeing Mary Anne take in the milk of a milkman that made free in a rosy-faced way (I think no worse of him) with every girl in the street but was quite frozen up like the statue at Charing Cross by her, saw Mary Anne's value in the lodging business and went as high as £1 per quarter more, consequently Mary Anne with not a word betwixt us says "If you will provide yourself Mrs. Lirriper in a month from this day I have already done the same," which hurt me and I said so, and she then hurt me more by insinuating that her father having failed in pork had laid her open to it.

My dear I do assure you it's a harassing thing to know what kind of girls to give the preference to, for if they are lively they get bell'd off their legs and if they are sluggish you suffer from it yourself in complaints and if they are sparkling-eyed they get made love to and if they are smart in their persons they try on your lodgers' bonnets and if they are musical I defy you to keep them away from bands and organs, and allowing for any difference you like in their heads their heads will be always out of window just the same. And then what the gentlemen like in girls the ladies don't, which is fruitful hot water for all parties, and then there's temper though such a temper as Caroline Maxey's I hope not often. A good-looking black-eyed girl was Caroline and a comely made girl to your cost when she did break out and laid about her, as took place first and last through a new-married couple come to see London in the first floor and the lady very high and it was supposed not liking the good looks of Caroline having none of her own to spare, but anyhow she did try Caroline though that was no excuse. So one afternoon Caroline comes down into the kitchen flushed and flashing, and she says to me "Mrs. Lirriper that woman in the first has aggravated me past bearing," I says "Caroline keep your temper," Caroline says with a curdling laugh, "Keep my temper? You're right Mrs. Lirriper, so I will. Capital D her!" bursts out Caroline (you might have struck me into the center of the earth with a feather when she said it) "I'll give her a touch of the temper that I keep!" Caroline downs with her hair my dear, screeches and rushes upstairs I following as fast as my trembling legs could bear me, but before I got into the room the dinner-cloth and pink-and-white service all dragged off upon the floor with a crash and the new-married couple on their backs in the fire-grate, him with the shovel and tongs and a dish of cucumber across him and a mercy it was summer-time. "Caroline" I says "be calm," but she catches off my cap and tears it in her teeth as she passes me, then pounces on the new-married lady makes her a bundle of ribbons takes her by the two ears and knocks the back of her head upon the carpet murder screaming all the time policemen running down the street and Wozenham's windows (judge of my feelings when I came to know it) thrown up and Miss Wozenham calling out from the balcony with crocodile's tears "It's Mrs. Lirriper been overcharging somebody to madness—she'll be murdered—I always thought so—pleeseman save her!" My dear four of them and Caroline behind the chiffonier attacking with the poker and when disarmed prize-fighting with her double fists, and down and up and up and down and dreadful. But I couldn't bear to see the poor young creature roughly handled and her hat torn when they got the better of her, and I says "Gentlemen policemen pray remember that her sex is the sex of your mothers and sisters and your sweethearts, and God bless them and you!" And there she was sitting down on the ground handcuffed, taking breath against the skirting-board and them cool with their coats in strips, and all she says was "Mrs. Lirriper I am sorry as ever I touched you, for you're a kind motherly old thing," and it made me think that I had often wished I had been a mother indeed and how would my heart have felt if I had been the mother of that girl! Well you know it turned out at the police-office that she had done it before, and she had her clothes away and was sent to prison, and when she was to come out I trotted off to the gate in the evening with just a morsel of jelly in that little basket of mine to give her a mite of strength to face the world again, and there I met with a very decent mother waiting for her son through bad company and a stubborn one he was with his half-boots not laced. So out came Caroline and I says "Caroline come along with me and sit down under the wall where it's retired and eat a little trifle that I have brought with me to do you good" and she throws her arms round my neck and says sobbing "O why were you never a mother when there are such mothers as there are!" she says, and in half a minute more she begins to laugh, and says "Did I really tear your cap to shreds?" and when I told her "You certainly did so Caroline" she laughed again and said while she patted my face "Then why do you wear such queer old caps you dear old thing? If you hadn't worn such queer old caps I don't think I should have done it even then." Fancy the girl! Nothing could get out of her what she was going to do except O she would do well enough, and we parted she being very thankful and kissing my hands, and I nevermore saw or heard of that girl, except that I shall always believe that a very genteel cap which was brought anonymous to me one Saturday night in an oilskin basket by a most impertinent young sparrow of a monkey whistling with dirty shoes on the clean steps and playing the harp on the airy railings with a hoop-stick came from Caroline.

What you lay yourself open to my dear in the way of being the object of uncharitable suspicions when you go into the lodging business I have not the words to tell you, but never was I so dishonorable as to have two keys nor would I willingly think it even of Miss Wozenham lower down on the other side of the way sincerely hoping that it may not be, though doubtless at the same time money cannot come from nowhere and it is not reason to suppose that Bradshaws put it in for love be it blotty as it may. It is a hardship hurting to the feelings that lodgers open their minds so wide to the idea that you are trying to get the better of them and shut their minds so close to the idea that they are trying to get the better of you, but as Major Jackman says to me "I know the ways of this circular world Mrs. Lirriper, and that's one of 'em all round it" and many is the little ruffle in my mind that the major has smoothed, for he is a clever man who has seen much. Dear dear, thirteen years have passed though it seems but yesterday since I was sitting with my glasses on at the open front-parlor window one evening in August (the parlors being then vacant) reading yesterday's paper my eyes for print being poor though still I am thankful to say a long sight at a distance, when I hear a gentleman come posting across the road and up the street in a dreadful rage talking to himself in a fury and d'ing and c'ing somebody. "By George!" says he out loud clutching his walking-stick, "I'll go to Mrs. Lirriper's. Which is Mrs. Lirriper's?" Then looking round and seeing me he flourishes his hat right off his head as if I had been the queen, and he says "Excuse the intrusion madam, but pray madam can you tell me at what number in this street there resides a well-known and much-respected lady by the name of Lirriper?" A little flustered though I must say gratified I took off my glasses and said "Sir, Mrs. Lirriper is your humble servant." "Astonishing!" says he. "A million pardons! Madam, may I ask you to have the kindness to direct one of your domestics to open the door to a gentleman in search of apartments, by the name of Jackman?" I had never heard the name but a politer gentleman I never hope to see, for says he "Madam I am shocked at your opening the door yourself to no worthier a fellow than Jemmy Jackman. After you madam. I never precede a lady." Then he comes into the parlors and he sniffs and he says "Hah! These are parlors! Not musty cupboards" he says "but parlors, and no smell of coal-sacks." Now my dear it having been remarked by some inimical to the whole neighborhood that it always smells of coal-sacks which might prove a drawback to lodgers if encouraged, I says to the major gently though firmly that I think he is referring to Arundel or Surrey or Howard but not Norfolk. "Madam" says he "I refer to Wozenham's lower down over the way—madam you can form no notion what Wozenham's is—madam it is a vast coal-sack and Miss Wozenham has the principles and manners of a female heaver—madam from the manner in which I have heard her mention you I know she has no appreciation of a lady, and from the manner in which she has conducted herself toward me I know she has no appreciation of a gentleman—madam my name is Jackman—should you require any other reference than what I have already said, I name the Bank of England—perhaps you know it!" Such was the beginning of the major's occupying the parlors and from that hour to this the same and a most obliging lodger and punctual in all respects except one irregular which I need not particularly specify, but made up for by his being a protection and at all times ready to fill in the papers of the assessed taxes and juries and that, and once collared a young man with the drawing-room clock under his cloak, and once on the parapets with his own hands and blankets put out the kitchen chimney and afterward attending the summons made a most eloquent speech against the parish before the magistrates and saved the engine, and ever quite the gentleman though passionate. And certainly Miss Wozenham's detaining the trunks and umbrella was not in a liberal spirit though it may have been according to her rights in law or an act I would myself have stooped to, the major being so much the gentleman that though he is far from tall he seems almost so when he has his shirt-frill out and his frock-coat on and his hat with the curly brims, and in what service he was I cannot truly tell you my dear whether militia or foreign, for I never heard him even name himself as major but always simple "Jemmy Jackman" and once soon after he came when I felt it my duty to let him know that Miss Wozenham had put it about that he was no major and I took the liberty of adding "which you are sir" his words were "Madam at any rate I am not a minor, and sufficient for the days is the evil thereof" which cannot be denied to be the sacred truth, nor yet his military ways of having his boots with only the dirt brushed off taken to him in the front parlor every morning on a clean plate and varnishing them himself with a little sponge and a saucer and a whistle in a whisper so sure as ever his breakfast is ended, and so neat his ways that it never soils his linen which is scrupulous though more in quality than quantity, neither that nor his mustaches which to the best of my belief are done at the same time and which are as black and shining as his boots, his head of hair being a lovely white.

It was the third year nearly up of the major's being in the parlors that early one morning in the month of February when Parliament was coming on and you may therefore suppose a number of impostors were about ready to take hold of anything they could get, a gentleman and lady from the country came in to view the second, and I well remember that I had been looking out of window and had watched them and the heavy sleet driving down the streets together looking for bills. I did not quite take to the face of the gentleman though he was good-looking too but the lady was a very pretty young thing and delicate, and it semed too rough for her to be out at all though she had only come from the Adelphi Hotel which would not have been much above a quarter of a mile if the weather had been less severe. Now it did so happen my dear that I had been forced to put 5 shillings weekly additional on the second in consequence of a loss from running away full-dressed as if going out to a dinner-party, which was very artful and had made me rather suspicious taking it along with Parliament, so when the gentleman proposed three months certain and the money in advance and leave them reserved to renew on the same terms for six months more, I says I was not quite certain but that I might have engaged myself to another party but would step downstairs and look into it if they would take a seat. They took a seat and I went down to the handle of the major's door that I had already begun to consult finding it a great blessing, and I knew by his whistling in a whisper that he was varnishing his boots which was generally considered private, however he kindly calls out "If it's you, madam, come in," and I went in and told him.

"Well, madam," says the major rubbing his nose—as

I did fear at the moment with the black sponge but it was only his knuckle, he being always neat and dexterous with his fingers—"well, madam, I suppose you would be glad of the money?"

I was delicate of saying "Yes" too out, for a little extra color rose into the major's cheeks and there was irregularity which I will not particularly specify in a quarter which I will not name.

"I am of opinion, madam," says the major "that when money is ready for you—when it is ready for you, Mrs. Lirriper—you ought to take it. What is there against it, madam, in this case upstairs?"

"I really cannot say there is anything against it, sir, still I thought I would consult you."

"You said a newly married couple, I think, madam?" says the major.

I says "Ye-es. Evidently. And indeed the young lady mentioned to me in a casual way that she had not been married many months."

The major rubbed his nose again and stirred the varnish round and round in its little saucer with his piece of sponge and took to his whistling in a whisper for a few moments. Then he says "You would call it a good let, madam?"

"Oh certainly a good let, sir."

"Say they renew for the additional six months. Would it put you about very much madam if—if the worst was to come to the worst?" said the major.

"Well I hardly know," I says to the major. "It depends upon circumstances. Would you object sir for instance?"

"I?" says the major. "Object? Jemmy Jackman? Mrs. Lirriper close with this proposal."

So I went upstairs and accepted, and they came in next day which was Saturday and the major was so good as to draw up a memorandum of an agreement in a beautiful round hand and expressions that sounded to me equally legal and military, and Mr. Edson signed it on the Monday morning and the major called upon Mr. Edson on the Tuesday and Mr. Edson called upon the major on the Wednesday and the second and the parlors were as friendly as could be wished.

The three months paid for had run out and we had got without any fresh overtures as to payment into May my dear, when there came an obligation upon Mr. Edson to go a business expedition right across the Isle of Man, which fell quite unexpected on that pretty little thing and is not a place that according to my views is particularly in the way to anywhere at any time but that may be a matter of opinion. So short a notice was it that he was to go the next day, and dreadfully she cried poor pretty and I am sure I cried too when I saw her on the cold pavement in the sharp east wind—it being a very backward spring that year—taking a last leave of him with her pretty bright hair blowing this way and that and her arms clinging round his neck and him saying "There there there! Now let me go Peggy." And by that time it was plain that what the major had been so accommodating as to say he would not object to happening in the house, would happen in it, and I told her as much when he was gone while I comforted her with my arm up the staircase, for I says "You will soon have others to keep up for my pretty and you must think of that."

His letter never came when it ought to have come and what she went through morning after morning when the postman brought none for her the very postman himself compassionated when she ran down to the door, and yet we cannot wonder at its being calculated to blunt the feelings to have all the trouble of other people's letters and none of the pleasure and doing it oftener in the mud and mizzle than not and at a rate of wages more resembling Little Britain than Great. But at last one morning when she was too poorly to come running downstairs he says to me with a pleased look in his face that made me next to love the man in his uniform coat though he was dripping wet. "I have taken you first in the street this morning Mrs. Lirriper, for here's the one for Mrs. Edson." I went up to her bedroom with it as fast as ever I could go, and she sat up in bed when she saw it and kissed it and tore it open and then a blank stare came upon her. "It's very short!" she says lifting her large eyes to my face. "O Mrs. Lirriper it's very short!" I says "My dear Mrs. Edson no doubt that's because your husband hadn't time to write more just at that time." "No doubt, no doubt," says she, and puts her two hands on her face and turns round in her bed.

I shut her softly in and I crept downstairs and I tapped at the major's door, and when the major having his thin slices of bacon in his own Dutch oven saw me he came out of his chair and put me down on the sofa. "Hush!" says he, "I see something's the matter. Don't speak—take time." I says "O major I am afraid there's cruel work upstairs." "Yes yes" says he "I had begun to be afraid of it—take time." And then in opposition to his own words he rages out frightfully, and says I shall never forgive myself madam, that I, Jemmy Jackman, didn't see it all that morning—didn't go straight upstairs when my boot-sponge was in my hand—didn't force it down his throat—and choke him dead with it on the spot!"

The major and me agreed when we came to ourselves that just at present we could do no more than to take on to suspect nothing and use our best endeavors to keep that poor young creature quiet, and what I ever should have done without the major when it got about among the organ-men that quiet was our object is unknown, for he made lion and tiger war upon them to that degree that without seeing it I could not have believed it was in any gentleman to have such power of bursting out with fire-irons walking-sticks water-jugs coals potatoes off his table the very hat off his head, and at the same time so furious in foreign languages that they would stand with their handles half-turned fixed like the Sleeping Ugly—for I cannot say Beauty.

Ever to see the postman come near the house now gave me such a fear that it was a reprieve when he went by, but in about another ten days or a fortnight he says again "Here's one for Mrs. Edson. Is she pretty well?" "She is pretty well postman, but not well enough to rise so early as she used" which was so far gospel truth.

I carried the letter in to the major at his breakfast and I says tottering "Major I have not the courage to take it up to her."

"It's an ill-looking villain of a letter," says the major.

"I have not the courage major" I says again in a tremble "to take it up to her."

After seeming lost in consideration for some moments the major says, raising his head as if something new and useful had occurred to his mind "Mrs. Lirriper, I shall never forgive myself that I, Jemmy Jackman, didn't go straight upstairs that morning when my boot-sponge was in my hand—and force it down his throat—and choke him dead with it."

"Major" I says a little hasty "you didn't do it which is a blessing, for it would have done no good and I think your sponge was better employed on your own honorable boots."

So we got to be rational, and planned that I should tap at her bedroom door and lay the letter on the mat outside and wait on the upper landing for what might happen, and never was gunpowder cannon-balls or shells or rockets more dreaded than that dreadful letter was by me as I took it to the second floor.

A terrible loud scream sounded through the house the minute after she had opened it, and I found her on the floor lying as if her life was gone. My dear I never looked at the face of the letter which was lying open by her, for there was no occasion.

Everything I needed to bring her round the major brought up with his own hands, besides running out to the chemist's for what was not in the house and likewise having the fiercest of all his many skirmishes with a musical instrument representing a ball-room I do not know in what particular country and company waltzing in and out at folding-doors with rolling eyes. When after a long time I saw her coming to, I slipped on the landing till I heard her cry, and then I went in and says cheerily "Mrs. Edson you're not well my dear and it's not to be wondered at," as if I had not been in before. Whether she believed or disbelieved I cannot say and it would signify nothing if I could, but I stayed by her for hours and then she God ever blesses me! and says she will try to rest for her head is bad.

"Major," I whispers, looking in at the parlors, "I beg and pray of you don't go out."

The major whispers, "Madam, trust me I will do no such a thing. How is she?"

I says "Major the good Lord above us only knows what burns and rages in her poor mind. I left her sitting at her window. I am going to sit at mine."

It came on afternoon and it came on evening. Norfolk is a delightful street to lodge in—provided you don't go lower down—but of a summer evening when the dust and waste paper lie in it and stray children play in it and a kind of a gritty calm and bake settles on it and a peal of church-bells is practicing in the neighborhood it is a trifle dull, and never have I seen it since at such a time and never shall I see it evermore at such a time without seeing the dull June evening when that forlorn young creature sat at her open corner window on the second and me at my open window (the other corner) on the third. Something merciful, something wiser and better far than my own self, had moved me while it was yet light to sit in my bonnet and shawl, and as the shadows fell and the tide rose I could sometimes—when I put out my head and looked at her window below—see that she leaned out a little looking down the street. It was just settling dark when I saw her in the street.

So fearful of losing sight of her that it almost stops my breath while I tell it, I went downstairs faster than I ever moved in all my life and only tapped with my hand at the major's door in passing it and slipping out. She was gone already. I made the same speed down the street and when I came to the corner of Howard Street I saw that she had turned it and was there plain before me going toward the west. O with what a thankful heart I saw her going along!

She was quite unacquainted with London and had very seldom been out for more than an airing in our own street where she knew two or three little children belonging to neighbors and had sometimes stood among them at the end of the street looking at the water. She must be going at hazard I knew, still she kept the by-streets quite correctly as long as they would serve her, and then turned up into the Strand. But at every corner I could see her head turned one way, and that way was always the river way.

It may have been only the darkness and quiet of the Adelphi that caused her to strike into it but she struck into it much as readily as if she had set out to go there, which perhaps was the case. She went straight down to the Terrace and along it and looked over the iron rail, and I often woke afterward in my own bed with the horror of seeing her doing it. The desertion of the wharf below and the flowing of the high water there seemed to settle her purpose. She looked about as if to make out the way down, and she struck out the right way or the wrong way—I don't know which, for I don't know the place before or since—and I followed her the way she went.

It was noticeable that all this time she never once looked back. But there was now a great change in the manner of her going, and instead of going at a steady quick walk with her arms folded before her—among the dark dismal arches she went in a wild way with her arms opened wide, as if they were wings and she was flying to her death.

We were on the wharf and she stopped. I stopped. I saw her hands at her bonnet-strings, and I rushed between her and the brink and took her round the waist with both my arms. She might have drowned me, I felt then, but she could never have got quit of me.

Down to that moment my mind had been all in a maze and not half an idea had I had in it what I should say to her, but the instant I touched her it came to me like magic and I had my natural voice and my senses and even almost my breath.

"Mrs. Edson!" I says "My dear! Take care. How ever did you lose your way and stumble on a dangerous place like this? Why you must have come here by the most perplexing streets in all London. No wonder you are lost, I am sure. And this place too! Why I thought nobody ever got here, except me to order my coals and the major in the parlors to smoke his cigar!"—for I saw that blessed man close by, pretending to it.

"Hah—hah—hum!" coughs the major.

"And good gracious me" I says, "why here he is!"

"Halloo! who goes there!" said the major in a military manner.

"Well!" I says, "if this don't beat everything! Don't you know us, Major Jackman?"

"Halloo!" says the major. "Who calls on Jemmy Jackman?" (and more out of breath he was, and did it less like life, than I should have expected).

"Why here's Mrs. Edson major" I says, "strolling out to cool her poor head which has been very bad, has missed her way and got lost, and goodness knows where she might have got to but for me coming here to drop an order into my coal-merchant's letter-box and you coming here to smoke your cigar! And you really are not well enough my dear" I says to her "to be half so far from home without me. And your arm will be very acceptable I am sure major" I says to him "and I know she may lean upon it as heavy as she likes." And now we had both got her—thanks be above!—one on each side.

She was all in a cold shiver and she so continued till I laid her on her own bed, and up to the early morning she held me by the hand and moaned and moaned "O wicked, wicked, wicked!" But when at last I made believe to droop my head and be overpowered with a dead sleep, I heard that poor young creature give such touching and such humble thanks for being preserved from taking her own life in her madness that I thought I should have cried my eyes out on the counterpane, and I knew she was safe.

Being well enough to do and able to afford it, me and the major laid our little plans next day while she was asleep worn out, and so I says to her as soon as I could do it nicely:

"Mrs. Edson my dear, when Mr. Edson paid me the rent for these further six months——"

She gave a start and I felt her large eyes look at me, but I went on with it and with my needlework.

"I can't say that I am quite sure I dated the receipt right. Could you let me look at it?"

She laid her frozen cold hand upon mine and she looked through me when I was forced to look up from my needlework, but I had taken the precaution of having on my spectacles.

"I have no receipt" says she.

"Ah! Then he has got it" I says in a careless way. "It's of no great consequence. A receipt's a receipt."

From that time she always had hold of my hand when I could spare it which was generally only when I read to her, for of course she and me had our bits of needlework to plod at and neither of us was very handy at those little things, though I am still rather proud of my share in them too considering. And though she took to all I read to her, I used to fancy that next to what was taught upon the Mount she took most of all to His gentle compassion for us poor women and to his young life and to how his mother was proud of him and treasured his sayings in her heart. She had a grateful look in her eyes that never never never will be out of mine until they are closed in my last sleep, and when I chanced to look at her without thinking of it I would always meet that look, and she would often offer me her trembling lip to kiss, much more like a little affectionate half-broken hearted child than ever I can imagine any grown person.

One time the trembling of this poor lip was so strong and her tears ran down so fast that I thought she was going to tell me all her woe, so I takes her two hands in mine and I says:

"No my dear not now, you had best not try to do it now. Wait for better times when you have got over this and are strong, and then you shall tell me whatever you will. Shall it be agreed?"

With our hands still joined she nodded her head many times, and she lifted my hands and put them to her lips and to her bosom.

"Only one word now my dear" I says. "Is there any one?"

She looked inquiringly "Any one?"

"That I can go to?"

She shook her head.

"No one that I can bring?"

She shook her head.

"No one is wanted by me my dear. Now that may be considered past and gone."

Not much more than a week afterward—for this was far on in the time of our being so together—I was bending over at her bedside with my ear down to her lips, by turns listening for her breath and looking for a sign of life in her face. At last it came in a solemn way—not in a flash but like a kind of pale faint light brought very slowly to the face.

She said something to me that had no sound in it, but I saw she asked me:

"Is this death?"

And I says "Poor dear poor dear, I think it is."

Knowing somehow that she wanted me to move her weak right hand, I took it and laid it on her breast and then folded her other hand upon it, and she prayed a good good prayer and I joined in it poor me though there were no words spoke. Then I brought the baby in its wrappers from where it lay, and I says:

"My dear this is sent to a childless old woman. This is for me to take of."

The trembling lip was put up toward my face for the last time and I dearly kissed it.

"Yes my dear" I says. "Please God! Me and the major."

I don't know how to tell it right, but I saw her soul brighten and leap up, and get free and fly away in the grateful look.

. . . .

So this is the why and wherefore of its coming to pass my dear that we call him Jemmy, being after the major his own godfather with Lirriper for a surname being after myself, and never was a dear child such a brightening thing in a lodging or such a playmate to his grandmother as Jemmy to this house and me, and always good and minding what he was told (upon the whole) and soothing for the temper and making everything pleasanter except when he grew old enough to drop his cap down Wozenham's airy and they wouldn't hand it up to him, and being worked into a state I put on my best bonnet and gloves and parasol with the child in my hand and I says "Miss Wozenham I little thought ever to have entered your house but unless my grandson's cap is instantly restored, the laws of this country regulating the property of the subject shall at length decide betwixt yourself and me, cost what it may." With a sneer upon her face which did strike me I must say as being expressive of two keys but it may have been a mistake and if there is any doubt let Miss Wozenham have the full benefit of it as is but right, she rang the bell and she says "Jane, is there a street-child's old cap down our airy?" I says "Miss Wozenham before your housemaid answers that question you must allow me to inform you to your face that my grandson is not a street-child and is not in the habit of wearing old caps. In fact" I says "Miss Wozenham I am far from sure that my grandson's cap may not be newer than your own" which was perfectly savage in me, her lace being the commonest machine-make washed and torn besides, but I had been put into a state to begin with fomented by impertinence. Miss Wozenham says red in the face "Jane you heard my question, is there any child's cap down our airy?" "Yes ma'am" says Jane "I think I did see some such rubbish lying there." "Then" says Miss Wozenham "let these visitors out, and then throw up that worthless article out of my premises." But here the child who had been staring at Miss Wozenham with all his eyes and more, frowns down his little eyebrows purses up his little mouth puts his chubby legs far apart turns his little dimpled fists round and round slowly over one another like a little coffee-mill, and says to her "Oo impdent to mi gran, me tut oor hi!" "Oh!" says Miss Wozenham looking scornfully at the mite "this is not a street-child is it not! Really!" I bursts out laughing and I says "Miss Wozenham if this ain't a pretty sight to you I don't envy your feelings and I wish you good-day. Jemmy come along with gran." And I was still in the best of humors though his cap came flying up into the street as if it had been just turned on out of the water-plug, and went home laughing all the way, all owing to that dear boy.

The miles and miles that me and the major have traveled with Jemmy in the dusk between the lights are not to be calculated, Jemmy driving on the coach-box which is the major's brass-bound writing-desk on the table, me inside in the easy-chair and the major guard up behind with a brown-paper horn doing it really wonderful. I do assure you my dear that sometimes when I have taken a few winks in my place inside the coach and have come half-awake by the flashing light of the fire and have heard that precious pet driving and the major blowing up behind to have the change of horses ready when we got to the inn, I have half-believed we were on the old North Road that my poor Lirriper knew so well. Then to see that child and the major both wrapped up getting down to warm their feet and going stamping about and having glasses of ale out of the paper match-boxes on the chimney-piece is to see the major enjoying it fully as much as the child I am very sure, and it's equal to any play when coachee opens the coach door to look in at me inside and say "Wery 'past that 'tage. 'Prightened old lady?"

But what my inexpressible feelings were when we lost that child can only be compared to the major's which were not a shade better, through his straying out at five years and eleven o'clock in the forenoon and never heard of by word or sign or deed till half-past nine at night, when the major had gone to the editor of the *Times* newspaper to put in an advertisement, which came out next day twenty-four hours after he was found, and which I mean always carefully to keep in my lavender drawer as the first printed account of him. The more the day got on, the more I got distracted and the major too and both of us made worse by the composed ways of the police though very civil and obliging and what I must call their obstinacy in not entertaining the idea that he was stolen. "We mostly find mum" says the sergeant who came round to comfort me, which he didn't at all and he had been one of the private constables in Caroline's time to which he referred in his opening words when he said "Don't give way to uneasiness in your mind mum, it'll all come as right as my nose did when I got the same barked by that young woman in your second floor"—says this sergeant "we mostly find mum as people ain't over-anxious to have what I may call second-hand children. You'll get him back mum." "O but my dear good sir" I says clasping my hands and wringing them and clasping them again "he is such an uncommon child!" "Yes mum" says the sergeant, "we mostly find that too mum. The question is what his clothes were worth." "His clothes" I says "were not worth much sir for he had only got his playing-dress on, but the dear child!——" "All right mum" says the sergeant. "You'll get him back mum. And even if he'd had his best clothes on, it wouldn't come to worse than his being found wrapped up in a cabbage-leaf, a-shivering in a lane." His words pierced my heart like daggers and daggers, and me and the major ran in and out like wild things all day long till the major returning from his interview with the editor of the *Times* at night rushes into my little room hysterical and squeezes my hand and wipes his eyes and says "Joy joy—officer in plain clothes came up on the steps as I was letting myself in—compose your feelings—Jemmy's found. Consequently I fainted away and when I came to, embraced the legs of the officer in plain clothes who seemed to be taking a kind of a quiet inventory in his mind of the property in my little room with brown whiskers, and I says "Blessings on you sir where is the darling?" and he says "In Kennington station-house." I was dropping at his feet stone at the image of that innocence in cells with murderers when he adds "He followed the monkey." I says deeming it slang language "O sir explain for a loving grandmother what monkey!" He says "him in the spangled cap with the strap under the chin, as won't keep on—him as sweeps the crossings on a round table and don't want to draw his saber more than he can help." Then I understood it all and most thankfully thanked him, and me and the major and him drove over to Kennington and there we found our boy lying quite comfortable before a blazing fire having sweetly played himself to sleep upon a small accordion nothing like so big as a flat-iron which they had been so kind as to lend him for the purpose and which it appeared had been stopped upon a very young person.

My dear the system upon which the major commenced and as I may say perfected Jemmy's learning when he was so small that if the dear was on the other side of the table you had to look under it instead of over it to see him with his mother's own bright hair in beautiful curls, is a thing that ought to be known to the throne and Lords and Commons and then might obtain some promotion for the major which he well deserves and would be none the worse foi (speaking between friends) L. S. D ically. When the major first undertook his learning he says to me:

"I'm going madam" he says "to make our child a calculating boy."

"Major" I says, "you terrify me and may do the pet a permanent injury you would never forgive yourself."

"Madam," says the major, "next to my regret that when I had my boot-sponge in my hand I didn't choke that scoundrel with it—on the spot——"

"There! For gracious' sake," I interrupts, "let his conscience find him without sponges."

"I say next to that regret, madam," says the major "would be the regret with which my breast," which he tapped, "would be surcharged if this fine mind was not early cultivated. But mark me madam," says the major holding up his forefinger "cultivated on a principle that will make it a delight."

"Major" I says "I will be candid with you and tell you openly that if ever I find the dear child fall off in his appetite I shall know it is his calculations and shall put a stop to them at two minutes' notice. Or if I find them mounting to his head I says, "or striking anyways cold to his stomach or leading to anything approaching flabbiness in his legs, tne result will be the same, but major you are a clever man and have seen much and you love the child and are his own godfather, and if you feel a confidence in trying try."

"Spoken madam" says the major "like Emma Lirriper. All I have to ask madam, is, that you will leave my godson and myself to make a week or two's preparations for surprising you, and that you will give leave to have up and down any small articles not actually in use that I may require from the kitchen."

"From the kitchen major!" I says half-feeling as if he had a mind to cook the child.

"From the kitchen" says the major, and smiles and swells, and at the same time looks taller.

So I passed my word and the major and the dear boy were shut up together for half an hour at a time through a certain while, and never could I hear anything going on betwixt them but talking and laughing and Jemmy clapping his hands and screaming out numbers, so I says to myself "it has not harmed him yet" nor could I on examining the dear find any signs of it anywhere about him which was likewise a great relief. At last one day Jemmy brings me a card in joke in the major's neat writing "The Messrs. Jemmy Jackman" for we had given him the major's other name too "request the honor of Mrs. Lirriper's company at the Jackman Institution in the front parlor this evening at five, military time, to witness a few slight feats of elementary arithmetic." And if you'll believe me there in the front parlor at five punctual to the moment was the major behind the Pembroke table with both leaves up and a lot of things from the kitchen tidily set out on old newspapers spread atop of it, and there was the mite stood up on a chair with his rosy cheeks flushing and his eyes sparkling clusters of diamonds.

"Now gran" says he, "oo tit down and don't oo touch ler poople"—for he saw with every one of those diamonds of his that I was going to give him a squeeze.

"Very well sir" I says "I am obedient in this good company I am sure." And I sits down in the easy-chair that was put for me, shaking my sides.

But picture my admiration when the major going on almost as quick as if he was conjuring sets out all the articles he names, and says, "Three saucepans, an Italian iron, a hand-bell, a toasting-fork, a nutmeg-grater, four pot-lids, a spice-box, two egg-cups, and a chopping-board —how many?" and when that mite instantly cried "Tifteen, tut down tive and carry ler 'toppin-board" and then claps his hands draws up his legs and dances on his chair!

My dear with the same astonishing ease and correctness him and the major added up the tables chairs and sofy, the picters fenders and fire-irons their own selves me and the cat and the eyes in Miss Wozenham's head, and whenever the sum was done young Roses and Diamonds claps his hands and draws up his legs and dances on his chair.

The pride of the major! ("Here's a mind ma'am!" he says to me behind his hand.)

Then he says aloud, "We now come to the next elementary rule—which is called——"

"Umtraction!" cries Jemmy.

"Right," says the major. "We have here a toasting-fork, a potato in its natural state, two pot-lids, one egg-cup, a wooden spoon, and two skewers, from which it is necessary for commercial purposes to subtract a sprat-girdiron, a small pickle-jar, two lemons, one pepper-castor, a blackbeetle-trap, and a knob of the dresser-drawer—what remains?"

"Toatin-fork!" cried Jemmy.

"In numbers how many?" says the major.

"One!" cried Jemmy.

("Here's a boy, ma'am!" says the major to me, behind his hand.)

Then the major goes on:

"We now approach the next elementary rule—which is entitled——"

"Tickleication" cries Jemmy.

"Correct" says the major.

But my dear to relate to you in detail the way in which they multiplied fourteen sticks of firewood by two bits of ginger and a larding-needle, or divided pretty well everything else there was on the table by the heater of the Italian iron and a chamber candlestick, and got a lemon over, would make my head spin round and round and round as it did at the time. So I says "If you'll excuse my addressing the chair Professor Jackman I think the period of the lecture has now arrived when it becomes necessary that I should take a good hug of this young scholar." Upon which Jemmy calls out from his station on the chair, "Gran oo open oor arms and me'll make a 'pring into 'em." So I opened my arms to him as I had opened my sorrowful heart when his poor young mother lay a-dying, and he had his jump and we had a good long hug together and the major prouder than any peacock says to me behind his hand, "You need not let him know it madam" (which I certainly need not for the major was quite audible) "but he is a boy!"

In this way Jemmy grew and grew and went to day-school and continued under the major too, and in summer we were as happy as the days were long, and in winter we were as happy as the days were short and there seemed to rest a blessing on the lodgings for they as good as let themselves and would have done it if there had been twice the accommodation, when sore and hard against my will I one day says to the major:

"Major you know what I am going to break to you. Our boy must go to boarding-school."

It was a sad sight to see the major's countenance drop, and I pitied the good soul with all my heart.

"Yes major" I says "though he is as popular with the lodgers as you are yourself and though he is to you and me what only you and me know, still it is in the course of things and life is made of parting and we must part with our pet."

Bold as I spoke, I saw two majors and half a dozen fire-places, and when the poor major put one of his neat bright-varnished boots upon the fender and his elbow on his knee and his head upon his hand and rocked himself a little to and fro, I was dreadfully cut up.

"But" says I clearing my throat "you have so well prepared him major—he has had such a tutor in you—that he will have none of the first drudgery to go through. And he is so clever besides that he'll soon make his way to the front rank."

"He is a boy" says the major—having sniffed—"that has not his like on the face of the earth."

"True as you say major, and it is not of us merely for our own sakes to do anything to keep him back from being a credit and an ornament whenever he goes and perhaps even rising to be a great man, is it major? He will have all my little savings when my work is done (being all the world to me) and we must try to make him a wise man and a good man, mustn't we major?"

"Madam" says the major rising "Jemmy Jackman is becoming an older file than I was aware of, and you put him to shame. You are thoroughly right madam. You are simply and undeniably right. And if you'll excuse me, I'll take a walk."

So the major being gone out and Jemmy being at home, I got the child into my little room here and I stood him by my chair and I took his mother's own curls in my hand and I spoke to him loving and serious. And when I had reminded the darling how that he was now in his tenth year and when I had said to him about his getting on in life pretty much what I had said to the major I broke to him how that we must have this same parting, and there I was forced to stop for there I saw of a sudden the well-remembered lip with its tremble, and it so brought back that time! But with the spirit that was in him he controlled it soon and he says gravely nodding through his tears, "I understand gran—I knew it must be, gran—go on gran, don't be afraid of me." And when I had said all that ever I could think of, he turned his bright steady face to mine and he says just a little broken here and there "You shall see gran that I can be a man and that I can do anything that is grateful and loving to you—and if I don't grow up to be what you would like to have me—I hope it will be—because I shall die." And with that he sat down by me and I went on to tell him of the school of which I had excellent recommendations and where it was and how many scholars and what games they played as I had heard and what length of holidays, to all of which he listened bright and clear. And so it came that at last he says "And now dear gran let me kneel down here where I have been used to say my prayers and let me fold my face for just a minute in your gown and let me cry, for you have been more than father—more than mother—more than brothers sisters friends—to me!" And so he did cry and I too and we were both much the better for it.

From that time forth he was true to his word and ever blithe and ready, and even when me and the major took him down into Licolnshire he was far the gayest of the party though for sure and certain he might easily have been that, but he really was and put life into us only when it came to the last good-by, he says with a wistful look, "You wouldn't have me not really sorry would you gran?" and when I says "No dear, Lord forbid!" he says "I am glad of that!" and ran in out of sight.

But now that the child was gone out of the lodgings the major fell into a regularly moping state. It was taken notice of by all the lodgers that the major moped. He hadn't even the same air of being rather tall that he used to have, and if he varnished his boots with a single gleam of interest it was as much as he did.

One evening the major came into my little room to take a cup of tea and a morsel of buttered toast and to read Jemmy's newest letter which had arrived that afternoon (by the very same postman more than middle-aged upon the beat now), and the letter raising him up a little I says to the major:

"Major you mustn't get into a moping way."

The major shook his head. "Jemmy Jackman madam," he says with a deep sigh, "is an older file than I thought him."

"Moping is not the way to grow younger major."

"My dear madam," says the major, "is there any way of growing younger?"

Feeling that the major was getting rather the best of that point I made a diversion to another.

"Thirteen years! Thir-teen years! Many lodgers have come and gone, in the thirteen years that you have lived in the parlors major."

"Hah!" says the major warming. "Many madam, many."

"And I should say you have been familiar with them all?"

"As a rule (with its exceptions like all rules) my dear madam" says the major, "they have honored me with their acquaintance, and not infrequently with their confidence."

Watching the major as he drooped his white head and stroked his black mustaches and moped again, a thought which I think mut have been going about looking for an owner somewhere dropped into my old noddle if you will excuse the expression.

"The walls of my lodgings," I says in a casual way—for my dear it is of no use going straight at a man who mopes—"might have something to tell, if they could tell it."

The major neither moved nor said anything but I saw he was attending with his shoulders my dear—attending with his shoulders to what I said. In fact I saw that his shoulders were struck by it.

"The dear boy was always fond of story-books" I went on, like as if I was talking to myself. "I am sure this house—his own home—might write a story or two for his reading one day or another."

The major's shoulders gave a dip and a curve and his head came up in his shirt-collar. The major's head came up in his shirt-collar as I hadn't seen it come up since Jemmy went to school.

"It is unquestionable that in intervals of cribbage and a friendly rubber, my dear madam," says the major, "and also over what used to be called in my young times—in the salad days of Jemmy Jackman—the social glass, I have exchanged many a reminiscence with your lodgers."

My remark was—I confess I made it with the deepest and artfullest of intentions—"I wish our dear boy had heard them!"

"Are you serious madam?" asks the major starting and turning full round.

"Why not major?"

"Madam" says the major, turning up one of his cuffs, "they shall be written for him."

"Ah! Now you speak" I says giving my hands a pleased clap. "Now you are in a way out of moping major!"

"Between this and my holidays—I mean the dear boy's" says the major turning up his other cuff, "a good deal may be done toward it."

"Major you are a clever man and you have seen much and not a doubt of it."

"I'll begin," says the major looking as tall as ever he did, "to-morrow."

My dear the major was another man in three days and he was himself again in a week and he wrote and wrote and wrote with his pen scratching like rats behind the wainscot, and whether he had many grounds to go upon or whether he did at all romance I cannot tell you, but what he has written is in the left-hand glass closet of the little bookcase close behind you.

CHAPTER II.

HOW THE PARLORS ADDED A FEW WORDS.

I HAVE the honor of presenting myself by the name of Jackman. I esteem it a proud privilege to go down to posterity through the instrumentality of the most remarkable boy that ever lived—by the name of Jemmy Jackman Lirriper—and of my most worthy and most highly respected friend, Mrs. Emma Lirriper, of 81 Norfolk Street, Strand, in the County of Middlesex, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

It is not for me to express the rapture with which we received that dear and eminently remarkable boy, on the occurrence of his first Christmas holidays. Suffice it to observe that when he came flying into the house with two splendid prizes (arithmetic and exemplary conduct), Mrs. Lirriper and myself embraced with emotion and instantly took him to the play, where we were all three admirably entertained.

Nor is it to render homage to the virtues of the best of her good and honored sex—whom, in deference to her unassuming worth, I will only here designate by the initials E. L.—that I add this record to the bundle of papers with which our, in a most distinguished degree, remarkable boy has expressed himself delighted, before reconsigning the same to the left-hand glass closet of Mrs Lirriper's little bookcase.

Neither is it to obtrude the name of the old original superannuated obscure Jemmy Jackman, once (to his degradation) of Wozenham's, long (to his elevation) of Lirriper's. If I could be consciously guilty of that piece of bad taste, it would indeed be a work of supererogation, now that the name is borne by Jemmy Jackman Lirriper.

No. I take up my humble pen to register a little record of our strikingly remarkable boy, which my poor capacity regards as presenting a pleasant little picture of the dear boy's mind. The picture may be interesting to himself when he is a man.

Our first reunited Christmas Day was the most delightful one we have ever passed together. Jemmy was never silent for five minutes, except in church-time. He talked as we sat by the fire, he talked when we were out walking, he talked as we sat by the fire again, he talked incessantly at dinner, though he made a dinner almost as remarkable as himself. It was the spring of happiness in his fresh young heart flowing and flowing, and it fertilized (if I may be allowed so bold a figure) my much-esteemed friend and J—— J——, the present writer.

There were only we three. We dined in my esteemed friend's little room, and our entertainment was perfect. But everything in the establishment is, in neatness, order, and comfort, always perfect. After dinner our boy slipped away to his old stool at my esteemed friend's knee, and there, with his hot chestnuts and his glass of brown sherry (really, a most excellent wine!) on a chair for a table, his face outshone the apples in the dish.

We talked of these jottings of mine, which Jemmy had read through and through by that time; and so it came about that my esteemed friend remarked, as she sat smoothing Jemmy's curls:

"And as you belong to the house too, Jemmy—and so much more than the lodgers, having been born in it—why, your story ought to be added to the rest, I think, one of these days."

Jemmy's eyes sparkled at this, and he said: "So I think, gran."

Then he sat looking at the fire, and then he began to laugh in a sort of confidence with the fire, and then he said, folding his arms across my esteemed friend's lap and raising his bright face to hers:

"Would you like to hear a boy's story, gran?"

"Of all things," replied my esteemed friend.

"Would you, godfather?"

"Of all things," I too replied.

"Well, then," said Jemmy, "I'll tell you one."

Here our indisputably remarkable boy gave himself a hug, and laughed again, musically, at the idea of coming out in that new line. Then he once more took the fire into the same sort of confidence as before, and began:

"Once upon a time, when pigs drank wine and monkeys chewed tobacker, 'twas neither in your time nor mine, but that's no macker——"

"Bless the child!" cried my esteemed friend, "what's amiss with his brain!"

"It's poetry, gran," returned Jemmy, shouting with laughter. "We always begin stories that way at school."

"Gave me quite a turn, major," said my esteemed friend, fanning herself with a plate. "Thought he was light-headed!"

"In those remarkable times, gran and godfather, there was once a boy—not me, you know."

"No, no," says my respected friend, "not you. Not him. Major, you understand?"

"No, no," says I.

"And he went to school in Rutlandshire——"

"Why not Lincolnshire?" says my respected friend.

"Why not, you dear old gran? Because I go to school in Lincolnshire, don't I?"

"Ah, to be sure!" says my respected friend. "And it's not Jemmy, you understand, major?"

"No, no," says I.

"Well!" our boy proceeded, hugging himself comfortably, and laughing merrily (again in confidence with the fire), before he again looked up in Mrs. Lirriper's face, "and so he was tremendously in love with his schoolmaster's daughter, and she was the most beautiful creature that ever was seen, and she had brown eyes, and she had brown hair all curling beautifully, and she had a delicious voice, and she was delicious altogether, and her name was Seraphina."

"What's the name of your schoolmaster's daughter, Jemmy?" asked my respected friend.

"Polly!" replied Jemmy, pointing his forefinger at her. "There now! Caught you! Ha! ha! ha!"

When he and my respected friend had had a laugh and a hug together, our admittedly remarkable boy resumed with a great relish:

"Well! And so he loved her. And so he thought about her, and dreamed about her, and made her presents of oranges and nuts, and would have made her presents of pearls and diamonds if he could have afforded it out of his pocket-money, but he couldn't. And so her father—Oh, he was a Tartar! Keeping the boys up to the mark, holding examinations once a month, lecturing upon all sorts of subjects at all sorts of times, and knowing everything in the world out of book. And so this boy——"

"Had he any name?" asks my respected friend.

"No, he hadn't, gran. Ha! ha! There now! Caught you again!"

After this, they had another laugh and another hug, and then our boy went on:

"Well! And so this boy, he had a friend about as old as himself at the same school, and his name (for he had a name, as it happened) was—let me remember—was Bobbo."

"Not Bob," says my respected friend.

"Of course not," says Jemmy. "What made you think it was, gran? Well! And so this friend was the cleverest and bravest and best-looking and most generous of all the friends that ever were, and so he was in love with Seraphina's sister, and so Seraphina's sister was in love with him, and so they all grew up."

"Bless us!" says my respected friend. "They were very sudden about it."

"So they all grew up," our boy repeated, laughing heartily, "and Bobbo and this boy went away together on horseback to seek their fortunes, and they partly got their horses by favor, and partly in a bargain; that is to say, they had saved up between them seven and fourpence, and the two horses, being Arabs, were worth more, only the man said he would take that, to favor them. Well! And so they made their fortunes and came prancing back to the school, with their pockets full of gold enough to last forever. And so they rang at the parents' and visitors' bell (not the back gate), and when the bell was answered they proclaimed, the same as if it was scarlet fever, 'Every boy goes home for an indefinite period!' And then there was great hurrahing, and then they kissed Seraphina and her sister—each his own love and not the other's on any account—and then they ordered the Tartar into instant confinement."

"Poor man!" said my respected friend.

"Into instant confinement, gran," repeated Jemmy, trying to look severe and roaring with laughter; "and he was to have nothing to eat but the boys' dinners, and was to drink half a cask of their beer every day. And so then the preparations were made for the two weddings, and there were hampers, and potted things, and sweet things, and nuts, and postage-stamps, and all manner of things. And so they were so jolly that they let the Tartar out, and he was jolly too."

"I am glad they let him out," says my respected friend, "because he had only done his duty."

"Oh, but hadn' the overdone it, though!" cried Jemmy. "Well! And so then this boy mounted his horse, with his bride in his arms, and cantered away, and cantered on and on till he came to a certain place where he had a certain gran and a certain godfather—not you two, you know."

"No, no," we both said.

"And there he was received with great rejoicings, and he filled the cupboard and the bookcase with gold, and he showered it out on his gran and his godfather because they were the two kindest and dearest people that ever lived in this world. And so while they were sitting up to their knees in gold, a knocking was heard at the street door, and who should it be but Bobbo, also on horseback, with his bride in his arms, and what had he come to say but that he would take (at double rent) all the lodgings, forever, that were not wanted by this boy and this gran and this godfather, and that they would all live together and all be happy! And so they were, and so it never ended!"

"And was there no quarreling?" asked my respected friend as Jemmy sat upon her lap and hugged her.

"No! Nobody ever quarreled."

"And did the money never melt away?"

"No! Nobody could ever spend it all."

"And did none of them ever grow older?"

"No! Nobody ever grew older after that."

"And did none of them ever die?"

"Oh, no, no, no, gran!" exclaimed our dear boy, laying his cheek upon her breast and drawing her closer to him. "Nobody ever died."

"Ah, major! major!" says my respected friend, smiling benignly upon me, "this beats our stories. Let us end with the boy's story, major, for the boy's story is the best that is ever told!"

In submission to which request on the part of the best of women, I have here noted it down as faithfully as my best abilities, coupled with my best intentions, would admit, subscribing it with my name,

J. JACKMAN.

THE PARLORS,
MRS. LIRRIPER'S LODGINGS.

MRS. LIRRIPER'S LEGACY.

IN TWO CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. LIRRIPER RELATES HOW SHE WENT ON AND WENT OVER.

AH! It's pleasant to drop into my own easy-chair my dear though a little palpitating what with trotting upstairs and what with trotting down, and why kitchen stairs should all be corner stairs is for the builders to justify though I do not think they fully understand their trade and never did, else why the sameness and why not more conveniences and fewer draughts and likewise a practice of laying the plaster on too thick I am well convinced which holds the damp, and as to chimney-pots putting them on by guesswork like hats at a party and no more knowing what their effect will be upon the smoke bless you than I do if so much, except that it will mostly be either to send it down your throat in a straight form or give it a twist before it goes there. And what I says speaking as I find of those new metal chimneys all manner of shapes (there's a row of 'em at Miss Wozenham's lodging-house lower down on the other side of the way) is that they only work your smoke into artificial patterns for you before you swallow it and that I'd quite as soon swallow mine plain, the flavor being the same, not to mention the conceit of putting up signs on the top of your house to show the forms in which you take your smoke into your inside.

Being here before your eyes my dear in my own easy-chair in my own quiet room in my own lodging-house No. 81 Norfolk Street Strand London situated midway between the City and St. James'—if anything is where it used to be with these hotels calling themselves limited but called unlimited by Major Jackman rising up everywhere and rising up into flagstaffs where they can't go any higher, but my mind of those monsters is give me a landlord's or landlady's wholesome face when I come off a journey and not a brass plate with an electrified number clicking out of it which it's not in nature can be glad to see me and to which I don't want to be hoisted like molasses at the docks and left there telegraphing for help with the most ingenious instruments but quite in vain—being here my dear I have no call to mention that I am still in the lodgings as a business hoping to die in the same and if agreeable to the clergy partly read over at Saint Clement's Danes and concluded in Hatfield churchyard when lying once again by my poor Lirriper ashes to ashes and dust to dust.

Neither should I tell you any news my dear in telling you that the major is still a fixture in the parlors quite as much so as the roof of the house, and that Jemmy is of boys the best and brightest and has ever had kept from him the cruel story of his poor pretty young mother Mrs. Edson being deserted in the second floor and dying in my arms, fully believing that I am his born gran and him an orphan, though what with engineering since he took a taste for it and him and the major making locomotives out of parasols broken iron pots and cotton-reels and them absolutely a-getting off the line and falling over the table and injuring the passengers almost equal to the originals it really is quite wonderful. And when I says to the major, "Major can't you by any means give us communication with the guard?" the major says quite huffy, "No madam it's not to be done," and when I says, "Why not?" the major says, "That is between us who are in the railway interest madam and our friend the right honorable vice-president of the Board of Trade," and if you'll believe me my dear the major wrote to Jemmy at school to consult him on the answer I should have before I could get even that amount of unsatisfactoriness out of the man, the reason being that when we first began with the little model and the working signals beautiful and perfect (being in general as wrong as the real) and when I says laughing "What appointment am I to hold in this undertaking gentlemen?" Jemmy hugs me round the neck and tells me dancing, "You shall be the public gran" and consequently they put upon me just as much as ever they like and I sit a-growling in my easy-chair.

My dear whether it is that a grown man as clever as the major cannot give half his heart and mind to anything—even a plaything—but must get into right down earnest with it, whether it is so or whether it is not so I do not undertake to say, but Jemmy is far outdone by the serious and believing ways of the major in the management of the United Grand Junction Lirriper and Jackman Great Norfolk Parlor Line, "For," says my Jemmy with the sparkling eyes when it was christened, "we must have a whole mouthful of name gran, or our dear old public," and there the young rogue kissed me, "won't stump up." So the public took the shares—ten at ninepence, and immediately when that was spent twelve preference at one and sixpence—and they were all signed by Jemmy and countersigned by the major, and between ourselves much better worth the money than some shares I have paid for in my time. In the same holidays the line was made and worked and opened and ran excursions and collisions and had burst its boilers and all sorts of accidents and offenses all most regular correct and pretty. The sense of responsibility entertained by the major as a military style of station-master my dear starting the down train behind time and ringing one of those little bells that you buy with the little coal-scuttles off the tray round the man's neck in the street did him honor, but noticing the major of a night when he is writing out his monthly report to Jemmy at school of the state of the rolling stock and the permanent way and all the rest of it (the whole kept upon the major's sideboard and dusted with his own hands every morning before varnishing his boots) I notice him as full of thought and care as full can be and frowning in a fearful manner, but indeed the major does nothing by halves as witness his great delight in going out surveying with Jemmy when he has Jemmy to go with, carrying a chain and a measuring-tape and driving I don't know what improvements right through Westminster Abbey and fully believed in the streets to be knocking everything upside down by act of Parliament. As please Heaven will come to pass when Jemmy takes to that as a profession!

Mentioning my poor Lirriper brings into my head his own youngest brother the doctor though doctor of what I am sure it would be hard to say unless liquor, for neither physic nor music nor yet law does Joshua Lirriper know a morsel of except continually being summoned to the County Court and having orders made upon him which he runs away from, and once was taken in the passage of this very house with an umbrella up and the major's hat on, giving his name with the door-mat round him as Sir Johnson Jones K. C. B. in spectacles residing at the Horse Guards. On which occasion he had got into the house not a minute before, through the girl letting him on to the mat when he sent in a piece of paper twisted more like one of those spills for lighting candles than a note, offering me the choice between 30 shillings in hand and his brains on the premises marked immediate and waiting for an answer. My dear it gave me such a dreadful turn to think of the brains of my poor dear Lirriper's own flesh and blood flying about the new oilcloth however unworthy to be so assisted, that I went out of my room here to ask him what he would take once for all not to do it for life when I found him in the custody of two gentlemen that I should have judged to be in the feather-bed trade if they had not announced the law, so fluffy were their personal appearance. "Bring your chains sir," says Joshua to the littlest of the two in the biggest hat, "rivet on my fetters!" Imagine my feelings when I pictered him clanking up Norfolk Street in irons and Miss Wozenham looking out of window! "Gentlemen," I says all of a tremble and ready to drop "please to bring him into Major Jackman's apartments." So they brought him into the parlors, and when the major spies his own curly brimmed hat on him which Joshua Lirriper had whipped off its peg in the passage for a military disguise he goes into such a tearing passion that he tips it off his head with his hand and kicks it up to the ceiling with his foot where it grazed long afterward. "Major" I says "be cool and advise me what to do with Joshua my dead and gone Lirriper's own youngest brother." "Madam" says the major "my advice is that you board and lodge him in a powder mill, with a handsome gratuity to the proprietor when exploded." "Major" I says "as a Christian you cannot mean your words." "Madam" says the major "by the Lord I do!" and indeed the major besides being with all his merits a very passionate man for his size had a bad opinion of Joshua on account of former troubles even unattended by liberties taken with his apparel. When Joshua Lirriper hears this conversation betwixt us he turns upon the littlest one with the biggest hat and says "Come sir! Remove me to my vile dungeon. Where is my moldy straw?" My dear at the picter of him rising in my mind dressed almost entirely in padlocks like Baron Trenck in Jemmy's book I was so overcome that I burst into tears and I says to the major "Major take my keys and settle with these gentlemen or I shall never know a happy minute more," which was done several times both before and since, but still I must remember that Joshua Lirriper has his good feelings and shows them in being always so troubled in his mind when he cannot wear mourning for his brother. Many a long year have I left off my widow's mourning not being wishful to intrude, but the tender point in Joshua that I cannot help a little yielding to is when he writes "One single sovereign would enable me to wear a decent suit of mourning for my much-loved brother. I vowed at the time of his lamented death that I would ever wear sables in memory of him but alas how short-sighted is man, how keep that vow when penniless!" It says a good deal for the strength of his feelings that he couldn't have been seven year old when my poor Lirriper died and to have kept it ever since is highly creditable. But we know there's good in all of us—if we only knew where it was in some of us—and though it was far from delicate in Joshua to work upon the dear child's feelings when first sent to school and write down into Lincolnshire for his pocket-money by return of post and got it, still he is my poor Lirriper's own youngest brother and mightn't have meant not paying his bill at the Salisbury Arms when his affection took him down to stay a fortnight at Hatfield churchyard and might have meant to keep sober but for bad company. Consequently if the major had played on him with the garden-engine which he got privately into his room without my knowing of it, I think that much as I should have regretted it there would have been words betwixt the major and me. Therefore my dear though he played on Mr. Buffle by mistake being hot in his head, and though it might have been misrepresented down at Wozenham's into not being ready for Mr. Buffle in other respects he being the assessed taxes, still I do not so much regret it as perhaps I ought. And whether Joshua Lirriper will yet do well in life I cannot say, but I did hear of his coming out at a private theater in the character of a bandit without receiving any offers afterward from the regular managers.

Mentioning Mr. Buffle gives an instance of there being good in persons where good is not expected, for it cannot be denied that Mr. Buffle's manners when engaged in his business were not agreeable. To collect is one thing, and to look about as if suspicious of the goods being gradually removing in the dead of the night by a back door is another, over taxing you have no control but suspecting is voluntary. Allowances too must ever be made for a gentleman of the major's warmth not relishing being spoke to with a pen in the mouth, and while I do not know that it is more irritable to my own feelings to have a low-crowned hat with a broad brim kept on indoors than any other hat still I can appreciate the major's, besides which without bearing malice or vengeance the major is a man that scores up arrears as his habit always was with Joshua Lirriper. So at last my dear the major lay in wait for Mr. Buffle and it worrited me a good deal. Mr. Buffle gives his rap of two sharp knocks one day and the major bounces to the door. "Collector has called for two quarters' assessed taxes" says Mr. Buffle. "They are ready for him" says the major and brings him in here. But on the way Mr. Buffle looks about him in his usual suspicious manner and the major fires and asks him "Do you see a ghost sir?" "No sir" says Mr. Buffle. "Because I have before noticed you" says the major "apparently looking for a specter very hard beneath the roof of my respected friend. When you find that supernatural agent, be so good as point him out sir." Mr. Buffle stares at the major and then nods at me. "Mrs. Lirriper" says the major going off into a perfect steam and introducing me with his hand. "Pleasure of knowing her" says Mr. Buffle. "A—um!—Jemmy Jackman sir!" says the major introducing himself. "Honor of knowing you by sight" says Mr. Buffle. "Jemmy Jackman sir" says the major wagging his head sideways in a sort of an obstinate fury "presents to you his esteemed friend that lady Mrs. Emma Lirriper of 81 Norfolk Street Strand London in the County of Middlesex in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Upon which occasion sir," says the major, "Jemmy Jackman takes your hat off." Mr. Buffle looks at his hat where the major drops it on the floor, and he picks it up and puts it on again. "Sir," says the major very red and looking him full in the face "there are two quarters of the gallantry taxes due and the collector has called." Upon which if you can believe my words my dear the major drops Mr. Buffle's hat off again. "This"—Mr. Buffle begins very angry with his pen in his mouth, when the major steaming more and more says "Take your bit out sir! Or by the whole infernal system of taxation of this country and every individual figure in the national debt, I'll get upon your back and ride you like a horse!" which it's my belief he would have done and even actually jerking his neat little legs ready for a spring as it was. "This," says Mr. Buffle without his pen "is an assault and I'll have the law of you." "Sir" replies the major "if you are a man of honor, your collector of whatever may be due on the honorable assessment by applying to Major Jackman at the parlors Mrs. Lirriper's lodgings, may obtain what he wants in full at any moment."

When the major glared at Mr. Buffle with those meaning words my dear I literally gasped for a teaspoonful of sal-volatile in a wineglass of water, and I says "Pray let it go no further gentlemen I beg and beseech of you!" But the major could be got to do nothing else but snort long after Mr. Buffle was gone, and the effect it had upon my whole mass of blood when on the next day of Mr. Buffle's rounds the major spruced himself up and went humming a tune up and down the street with one eye almost obliterated by his hat there are not expressions in Johnson's dictionary to state. But I safely put the street door on the jar and got behind the major's blinds with my shawl on my mind made up the moment I saw danger to rush out screeching till my voice failed me and catch the major round the neck till my strength went and have all parties bound. I had not been behind the blinds a quarter of an hour when I saw Mr. Buffle approaching with his collecting-books in his hand. The major likewise saw him approaching and hummed louder and himself approached. They met before the airy railings. The major takes off his hat at arm's length and says "Mr. Buffle I believe?" Mr. Buffle takes off his hat at arm's length and says "That is my name sir." Says the major "Have you any commands for me, Mr. Buffle?" Says Mr. Buffle "Not any sir." Then my dear both of 'em bowed very low and haughty and parted, and whenever Mr. Buffle made his rounds in future him and the major always met and bowed before the airy railings, putting me much in mind of Hamlet and the other gentleman in mourning before killing one another, though I could have wished the other gentleman had done it fairer and even if less polite no poison.

Mr. Buffle's family were not liked in this neighborhood for when you are a householder my dear you'll find it does not come by nature to like the assessed, and it was considered besides that a one-horse pheayton ought not to have elevated Mrs. Buffle to that height especially when purloined from the taxes which I myself did consider uncharitable. But they were not liked and there was that domestic unhappiness in the family in consequence of their both being very hard with Miss Buffle and one another on account of Miss Buffle's favoring Mr. Buffle's articled young gentleman, that it was whispered that Miss Buffle would go either into a consumption or a convent she being so very thin and off her appetite and two close-shaved gentlemen with white bands round their necks peeping round the corner whenever she went out in waistcoats resembling black pinafores. So things stood toward Mr. Buffle when one night I was woke by a frightful noise and a smell of burning, and going to my bedroom window saw the whole street in a glow. Fortunately we had two sets empty just then and before I could hurry on some clothes I heard the major hammering at the attics' doors and calling out "Dress yourselves!—fire! Don't be frightened!—fire! Collect your presence of mind—fire! All right—fire!" most tremenjously. As I opened my bedroom door the major came tumbling over himself and me, and caught me in his arms. "Major" I says breathless "where is it?" "I don't know dearest madam" says the major—"fire! Jemmy Jackman will defend you to the last drop of his blood—fire! If the dear boy was at home what a treat this would be for him—fire!" and altogether very collected and bold except that he couldn't say a single sentence without shaking me to the very center with roaring fire. We ran down to the drawing-room and put our heads out of window, and the major calls to an unfeeling young monkey scampering by be joyful and ready to split "Where is it?—fire!" The monkey answers without stopping "Oh here's a lark! Old Buffle's been setting his house alight to prevent its being found out that he boned the taxes. Hurrah! Fire!" And then the sparks came flying up and the smoke came pouring down and the crackling of flames and spatting of water and banging of engines and hacking of axes and breaking of glass and knocking at doors and the shouting and crying and hurrying and the heat and altogether gave me a dreadful palpitation. "Don't be frightened dearest madam," says the major—"fire! There's nothing to be alarmed at—fire! Don't open the street door till I come back—fire! I'll go and see if I can be of any service—fire! You're quite composed and comfortable ain't you—fire! fire! fire!" It was in vain for me to hold the man and tell him he'd be galloped to death by the engines—pumped to death by his over-exertions—wet-feeted to death by the slop and mess—flattened to death when the roofs fell in—his spirit was up and he went scampering after the young monkey with all the breath he had and none to spare, and me and the girls huddled together at the parlor windows looking at the dreadful flames above the houses over the way, Mr. Buffle's being round the corner. Presently what should we see but some people running down the street straight to our door, and then the major directing operations in the busiest way, and then some more people and then—carried in a chair similar to Guy Fawkes—Mr. Buffle in a wet blanket!

My dear the major has Mr. Buffle brought up our steps and whisked into the parlor and carted out on the sofy, and then he and all the rest of them without so much as a word burst away again full speed, leaving the impression of a vision except for Mr. Buffle awful in his blanket with his eyes a-rolling. In a twinkling they all burst back again with Mrs. Buffle in another blanket, which whisked in and carted out on the sofy they all burst off again and all burst back again with Miss Buffle in another blanket, which again whisked in and carted out they all burst off again and all burst back again with Mr. Buffle's articled young gentleman in another blanket—him a-holding round the necks of two men carrying him by the legs, similar to the picter of the disgraceful creetur who has lost the fight (but where the chair I do not know) and his hair having the appearance of newly played upon. When all four of a row, the major rubs his hands and whispers me with what little hoarseness he can get together, "If our dear remarkable boy was only at home what a delightful treat this would be for him!"

My dear we made them some hot tea and toast and some hot brandy-and-water with a little comfortable nutmeg in it, and at first they were all scared and low in their spirits but being fully insured got sociable. And the first use Mr. Buffle made of his tongue was to call the major his preserver and his best of friends and to say "My forever dearest sir let me make you known to Mrs. Buffle" which also addressed him as her preserver and her best of friends and was fully as cordial as the blanket would admit of. Also Miss Buffle. The articled young gentleman's head was a little light and he sat a-moaning "Robina is reduced to cinders, Robina is reduced to cinders!" Which went more to the heart on account of his having got wrapped in his blanket as if he was looking out of a violinceller case, until Mr. Buffle says "Robina speak to him!" Miss Buffle says "Dear George!" and but for the major's pouring down brandy-and-water on the instant which caused a catching in his throat owing to the nutmeg and a violent fit of coughing it might have proved too much for his strength. When the articled young gentleman got the better of it Mr. Buffle leaned up against Mrs. Buffle being two bundles, a little while in confidence, and then says with tears in her eyes which the major noticing wiped, "We have not been an united family, let us after this danger become so, take her George." The young gentleman could not put his arm out far to do it, but his spoken expressions were very beautiful though of a wandering class. And I do not know that I ever had a much pleasanter meal than the breakfast we took together after we had all dozed, when Miss Buffle made tea very sweetly in quite the Roman style as depicted formerly at Covent Garden Theater and when the whole family was most agreeable, as they have ever proved since that night when the major stood at the foot of the fire-escape and claimed them as they came down—the young gentleman head-foremost, which accounts. And though I do not say that we should be less liable to think ill of one another if strictly limited to blankets, still I do say that we might most of us come to a better understanding if we kept one another less at a distance.

Why there's Wozenham's lower down on the other side of the street. I had a feeling of much soreness several years respecting what I must still ever call Miss Wozenham's systematic underbidding and the likeness of the house in Bradshaw having far too many windows and a most umbrageous and outrageous oak which never yet was seen in Norfolk Street nor yet a carriage and four at Wozenham's door which it would have been far more to Bradshaw's credit to have drawn a cab. This frame of mind continued bitter down to the very afternoon in January last when one of my girls, Sally Rairyganoo which I still suspect of Irish extraction though family represented Cambridge, else why abscond with a bricklayer of the Limerick persuasion and be married in pattens not waiting till his black eye was decently got round with all the company fourteen in number and one horse fighting outside of the roof of the vehicle—I repeat my dear my ill-regulated state of mind toward Miss Wozenham continued down to the very afternoon of January last past when Sally Rairyganoo came banging (I can use no milder expression) into my room with a jump which may be Cambridge and may not, and said "Hurroo missis! Miss Wozenham's sold up!" My dear when I had it thrown in my face and conscience that the girl Sally had reason to think I could be glad of the ruin of a fellow-creeter, I burst into tears and dropped back in my chair and I says "I am ashamed of myself!"

Well! I tried to settle to my tea but I could not do it what with thinking of Miss Wozenham and her distresses. It was a wretched night and I went up to a front window and looked over at Wozenham's and as well as I could make it out down the street in the fog it was the dismalest of the dismal and not a light to be seen. So at last I says to myself "This will not do," and I puts on my oldest bonnet and shawl not wishing Miss Wozenham to be reminded of my best at such a time, and lo and behold you I goes over to Wozenham's and knocks. "Miss Wozenham at home?" I says turning my head when I heard the door go. And then I saw it was Miss Wozenham herself who had opened it and sadly worn she was poor thing and her eyes all swelled and swelled with crying. "Miss Wozenham" I says "it is several years since there was a little unpleasantness betwixt us on the subject of my grandson's cap being down your airy. I have overlooked it and I hope you have done the same." "Yes Mrs. Lirriper" she says in a surprise "I have." "Then my dear" I says "I should be glad to come in and speak a word to you." Upon my calling her my dear Miss Wozenham breaks out a-crying most pitiful, and a not unfeeling elderly person that might have been better shaved in a nightcap with a hat over it offering a polite apology for the mumps having worked themselves into his constitution, and also for sending home to his wife on the bellows which was in his hand as a writing-desk, looks out of the back parlor and says "The lady wants a word of comfort" and goes in again. So I was able to say quite natural "Wants a word of comfort does she sir? Then please the pigs she shall have it!" And Miss Wozenham and me we go into the front room with a wretched light that seemed to have been crying too and was sputtering out, and I says "Now my dear, tell me all," and she wrings her hands and says, "O Mrs. Lirriper that man is in possession here, and I have not a friend in the world who is able to help me with a shilling."

It doesn't signify a bit what a talkative old body like me said to Miss Wozenham when she said that, and so I'll tell you instead my dear that I'd have given 30 shillings to have taken her over to tea, only I durstn't on account of the major. Not you see but what I knew I could draw the major out like thread and wind him round my finger on most subjects and perhaps even on that if I was to set myself to it, but him and me had so often belied Miss Wozenham to one another that I was shamefaced, and I knew she had offended his pride and never mine, and likewise I felt timid that that Rairyganoo girl might make things awkward. So I says "My dear if you could give me a cup of tea to clear my muddle of a head I should better understand your affairs." And we had the tea and the affairs too and after all it was but £40, and—there! she's as industrious and straight a creeter as ever lived and has paid back half of it already, and where's the use of saying more, particularly when it ain't the point? For the point is that when she was a-kissing my hands and holding them in hers and kissing them again and blessing blessing blessing, I cheered up at last and I says "Why what a waddling old goose I have been my dear to take you for something so very different!" "Ah but I too" says she "how have I mistaken you!" "Come for goodness' sake tell me" I says "what you thought of me." "Oh" says she "I thought you had no feeling for such a hard hand-to-mouth life as mine, and were rolling in affluence." I says shaking my sides (and very glad to do it for I had been a-choking quite long enough) "Only look at my figure my dear and give me your opinion whether if I was in affluence I should be likely to roll in it!" That did it! We got as merry as grigs (whatever they are, if you happen to know my dear—I don't) and I went home to my blessed home as happy and as thankful as could be. But before I make an end of it, think even of my having misunderstood the major! Yes! For next forenoon the major came into my little room with his brushed hat in his hand and he begins "My dearest madam——" and then put his face in his hat as if he had just come into church. As I sat all in a maze he came out of his hat and began again. "My esteemed and beloved friend——" and then went into his hat again. "Major," I cries out frightened "has anything happened to our darling boy?" "No, no, no" says the major "but Miss Wozenham has been here this morning to make her excuses to me, and by the Lord I can't get over what she told me." "Hoity toity, major," I says "you don't know yet that I was afraid of you last night and didn't think half as well of you as I ought! So come out of church major and forgive me like a dear old friend and I'll never do so any more." And I leave you to judge my dear whether I ever did or will. And how affecting to think of Miss Wozenham out of her small income and her losses doing so much for her poor old father, and keeping a brother that had had the misfortune to soften his brain against the hard mathematics as neat as a new pin in the three back represented to lodgers as a lumber-room and consuming a whole shoulder of mutton whenever provided!

And now my dear I really am a-going to tell you about my legacy if you're inclined to favor me with your attention, and I did fully intend to have come straight to it only one thing does so bring up another. It was the month of June and the day before Midsummer Day when my girl Winifred Madgers—she was what is termed a Plymouth sister, and the Plymouth brother that made away with her was quite right, for a tidier young woman for a wife never came into a house and afterward called with the beautifullest Plymouth twins—it was the day before Midsummer Day when Winifred Madgers comes and says to me "A gentleman from the consul's wishes particular to speak to Mrs. Lirriper." If you'll believe me my dear the consols at the bank where I have a little matter for Jemmy got into my head, and I says "Good gracious I hope he ain't had any dreadful fall!" Says Winifred "He don't look as if he had ma'am." And I says "Show him in."

The gentleman came in dark and with his hair cropped what I should consider too close, and he says very polite "Madam Lirrwiper?" I says "Yes sir. Take a chair." "I come," says he "frrwom the Frrwench consul's." So I saw at once that it wasn't the Bank of England. "We have rrweceived," says the gentleman turning his r's very curious and skillful, "frrwom the Mairrwie at Sens, a communication which I will have the honor to rrwead. Madam Lirrwiper understands Frrwench?" "Oh dear no sir!" says I. "Madam Lirrwiper don't understand anything of the sort." "It matters not," says the gentleman, "I will trrwanslate."

With that my dear the gentleman after reading something about a department and a mairie (which Lord forgive me I supposed till the major came home was Mary, and never was I more puzzled than to think how that young woman came to have so much to do with it) translated a lot with the most obliging pains, and it came to this: That in the town of Sens in France an unknown Englishman lay a-dying. That he was speechless and without motion. That in his lodging there was a gold watch and a purse containing such and such money and a trunk containing such and such clothes, but no passport and no papers, except that on his table was a pack of cards and that he had written in pencil on the back of the ace of hearts: "To the authorities. When I am dead, pray send what is left, as a last legacy, to Mrs. Lirriper 81 Norfolk Street Strand London." When the gentleman had explained all this, which seemed to be drawn up much more methodical than I should have given the French credit for, not at that time knowing the nation, he put the document into my hand. And much the wiser I was for that you may be sure, except that it had the look of being made out upon grocery paper and was stamped all over with eagles.

"Does Madam Lirrwiper" says the gentleman "believe she rrwecognizes her unfortunate compatrrwiot?"

You may imagine the flurry it put me into my dear to be talked to about my compatriots.

I says "Excuse me. Would you have the kindness sir to make your language as simple as you can?"

"This Englishman unhappy, at the point of death. This compatrrwiot afflicted," says the gentleman.

"Thank you sir" I says "I understand you now. No sir I have not the least idea who this can be."

"Has Madam Lirrwiper no son, no nephew, no godson, no frrwiend, no acquaintance of any kind in Frrwance?"

"To my certain knowledge" says I "no relation or friend, and to the best of my belief no acquaintance."

"Pardon me. You take locataires?" says the gentleman.

My dear fully believing he was offering me something with his obliging foreign manners—snuff for anything I knew—I gave a little bend of my head and I says if you'll credit it, "No I thank you. I have not contracted the habit."

The gentleman looks perplexed and says "Lodgers?"

"Oh!" says I laughing. "Bless the man! Why yes to be sure!"

"May it not be a former lodger?" says the gentleman. "Some lodger that you pardoned some rrwent? You have pardoned lodgers some rrwent?"

"Hem! It has happened sir" says I, "but I assure you I can call to mind no gentleman of that description that this is at all likely to be."

In short my dear we could make nothing of it, and the gentleman noted down what I said and went away. But he left me the paper of which he had two with him, and when the major came in I says to the major as I put it in his hand "Major here's old Moore's almanac with the hieroglyphic complete, for your opinion."

It took the major a little longer to read than I should have thought, judging from the copious flow with which he seemed to be gifted when attacking the organ-men, but at last he got through it and stood a-gazing at me in amazement.

"Major" I says "you're paralyzed."

"Madam" says the major, "Jemmy Jackman is doubled up."

Now it did so happen that the major had been out to get a little information about railroads and steamboats, as our boy was coming home for his midsummer holidays next day, and we were going to take him somewhere for a treat and a change. So while the major stood a-gazing it came into my head to say to him "Major I wish you'd go and look at some of your books and maps, and see whereabouts this same town of Sens is in France."

The major he roused himself and he went into the parlors and he poked about a little, and he came back to me and he says, "Sens my dearest madam is seventy-odd miles south of Paris."

With what I may truly call a desperate effort "Major" I says "we'll go there with our blessed boy!"

If ever the major was beside himself it was at the thoughts of that journey. All day long he was like the wild man of the woods after meeting with an advertisement in the papers telling him something to his advantage, and early next morning, hours before Jemmy could possibly come home he was outside in the street ready to call out to him that we was all a-going to France. Young Rosy-cheeks you may believe was as wild as the major, and they did carry on to that degree that I says, "If you two children ain't more orderly I'll pack you both off to bed." And then they fell to cleaning up the major's telescope to see France with, and went out and bought a leather bag with a snap to hang round Jemmy, and him to carry the money like a little Fortunatus with his purse.

If I hadn't passed my word and raised their hopes, I doubt if I could have gone through with the undertaking but it was too late to go back now. So on the second day after Midsummer Day we went off by the morning mail. And when we came to the sea which I had never seen but once in my life and that when my poor Lirriper was courting me, the freshness of it and the deepness and the airiness and to think that it had been rolling ever since and that it was always a-rolling and so few of us minding, made me feel quite serious. But I felt happy too and so did Jemmy and the major and not much motion on the whole, though me with a swimming in the head and a sinking but able to take notice that the foreign insides appear to be constructed hollower than the English, leading to much more tremenjous noises when bad sailors.

But my dear the blueness and the lightness and the colored look of everything and the very sentry-boxes striped and the shining rattling drums and the little soldiers with their waists and tidy gaiters, when we got across to the Continent—it made me feel as if I don't know what—as if the atmosphere had been lifted off me. And as to lunch why bless you if I kept a man-cook and two kitchen-maids I couldn't get it done for twice the money, and no injured young women a-glaring at you and grudging you and acknowledging your patronage by wishing that your food might choke you, but so civil and so hot and attentive and every way comfortable except Jemmy pouring wine down his throat by tumblerfuls and me expecting to see him drop under the table.

And the way in which Jemmy spoke his French was a real charm. It was often wanted of him, for whenever anybody spoke a syllable to me I says "Noncomprenny, you're very kind but it's no use. Now Jemmy!" and then Jemmy he fires away at 'em lovely, the only thing wanting in Jemmy's French being as it appeared to me that he hardly ever understood a word of what they said to him which made it scarcely of the use it might have been though in other respects a perfect native, and regarding the major's fluency I should have been of the opinion judging French by English that there might have been a greater choice of words in the language though still I must admit that if I hadn't known him when he asked a military gentleman in a gray cloak what o'clock it was I should have took him for a Frenchman born.

Before going on to look after my legacy we were to make one regular day in Paris, and I leave you to judge my dear what a day that was with Jemmy and the major and the telescope and me and the prowling young man at the inn door (but very civil too) that went along with us to show the sights. All along the railway to Paris Jemmy and the major had been frightening me to death by stooping down on the platforms at stations to inspect the engines underneath their mechanical stomachs, and by creeping in and out I don't know where all, to find improvements for the United Grand Junction Parlor, but when we got out into the brilliant streets on a bright morning they gave up all their London improvements as a bad job and gave their minds to Paris. Says the prowling young man to me "Will I speak Inglis no?" So I says "If you can young man I shall take it as a favor," but after half an hour of it when I fully believed the man had gone mad and me too I says "Be so good as to fall back on your French sir," knowing that then I shouldn't have the agonies of trying to understand him which was a happy release. Not that I lost much more than the rest either, for I generally noticed that when he had described something very long indeed and I says to Jemmy "What does he say Jemmy?" Jemmy says looking at him with vengeance in his eye "He is so jolly indistinct!" and that when he had described it longer all over again and I says to Jemmy "Well Jemmy what's it all about?" Jemmy says "He says the building was repaired in 1704, gran."

Wherever that prowling young man formed his prowling habits I cannot be expected to know, but the way in which he went round the corner while we had our breakfasts and was there again when we swallowed the last crumb was most marvelous, and just the same at dinner and at night, prowling equally at the theater and the inn gateway and the shop doors when we bought a trifle or two and everywhere else but troubled with a tendency to spit. And of Paris I can tell you no more my dear than that it's town and country both in one, and carved stone and long streets of high houses and gardens and fountains and statues and trees and gold, and immensely big soldiers and immensely little soldiers and the pleasantest nurses with the whitest caps a-playing at skipping-rope with the bunchiest babies in the flattest caps, and clean table-cloths spread everywhere for dinner and people sitting out of doors smoking and sipping all day long and little plays being acted in the open air for little people and every shop a complete and elegant room, and everybody seeming to play at everything in this world. And as to the sparkling lights my dear after dark, glittering high up and low down and on before and on behind and all round, and the crowd of theaters and the crowd of people and the crowd of all sorts, it's pure enchantment. And pretty well the only thing that grated on me was that whether you pay your fare at the railway or whether you change your money at a money-dealer's or whether you take your ticket at the theater, the lady or gentleman is caged up (I suppose by government) behind the strongest iron bars having more of a zoölogical appearance than a free country.

Well to be sure when I did after all get my precious bones to bed that night, and my young rogue came in to kiss me and asks "What do you think of this lovely lovely Paris, gran?" I says "Jemmy I feel as if it was beautiful fireworks being set off in my head." And very cool and refreshing the pleasant country was next day when we went on to look after my legacy, and rested me much and did me a deal of good.

So at length and at last my dear we come to Sens, a pretty little town with a great two-towered cathedral and the rooks flying in and out of the loop-holes and another tower atop of one of the towers like a sort of a stone pulpit. In which pulpit with the birds skimming below him if you'll believe me, I saw a speck while I was resting at the inn before dinner which they made signs to me was Jemmy and which really was. I had been a-fancying as I sat in the balcony of the hotel that an angel might light there and call down to the people to be good, but I little thought what Jemmy all unknown to himself was a-calling down from that high place to some one in the town.

The pleasantest situated inn my dear! Right under the two towers, with their shadows a-changing upon it all day like a kind of a sun-dial, and country people driving in and out of the court-yard in carts and hooded cabriolets and such like, and a market outside in front of the cathedral, and all so quaint and like a picter. The major and me agreed that whatever came of my legacy this was the place to stay in for our holiday, and we also agreed that our dear boy had best not be checked in his joy that night by the sight of the Englishman if he was still alive, but that we would go together and alone. For you are to understand that the major not feeling himself quite equal in his wind to the height to which Jemmy had climbed, had come back to me and left him with the guide.

So after dinner when Jemmy had set off to see the river, the major went down to the mairie, and presently came back with a military character in a sword and spurs and a cocked hat and a yellow shoulder-belt and long tags about him that he must have found inconvenient. And the major says "The Englishman still lies in the same state dearest madam. This gentleman will conduct us to his lodging." Upon which the military character pulled off his cocked hat to me, and I took notice that he had shaved his forehead in imitation of Napoleon Bonaparte but not like.

We went out at the court-yard gate and past the great doors of the cathedral and down a narrow high-street where the people were sitting chatting at their shop doors and the children were at play. The military character went in front and he stopped at a pork-shop with a little statue of a pig sitting up, in the window, and a private door that a donkey was looking out of.

When the donkey saw the military character he came slipping out on the pavement to turn round and then clattered along the passage into a back yard. So the coast being clear the major and me were conducted up the common stairs and into the front room on the second, a bare room with a red tiled floor and the outside lattice blinds pulled close to darken it. As the military character opened the blinds I saw the tower where I had seen Jemmy, darkening as the sun got low, and I turned to the bed by the wall and saw the Englishman.

It was some kind of brain fever he had had, and his hair was all gone, and some wetted folded linen lay upon his head. I looked at him very attentive as he lay there all wasted away with his eyes closed, and I says to the major:

"I never saw this face before."

The major looked at him very attentive too, and he says:

"I never saw this face before."

When the major explained our words to the military character, that gentleman shrugged his shoulders and showed the major the card on which it was written about the legacy for me. It had been written with a weak and trembling hand in bed, and I knew no more of the writing than of the face. Neither did the major.

Though lying there alone, the poor creetur was as well taken care of as could be hoped, and would have been quite unconscious of any one's sitting by him then. I got the major to say that we were not going away at present and that I would come back to-morrow and watch a bit by the bedside. But I got him to add—and I shook my head hard to make it stronger—"We agree that we never saw this face before."

Our boy was greatly surprised when we told him sitting out in the balcony in the starlight, and he ran over some of those stories of former lodgers, of the major's putting down, and asked wasn't it possible that it might be this lodger or that lodger. It was not possible, and we went to bed.

In the morning just at breakfast-time the military character came jingling round, and said that the doctor thought from the signs he saw there might be some rally before the end. So I says to the major and Jemmy, "You two boys go and enjoy yourselves, and I'll take my prayer-book and go sit by the bed." So I went, and I sat there some hours, reading a prayer for him poor soul now and then, and it was quite on in the day when he moved his hand.

He had been so still, that the moment he moved I knew of it, and I pulled off my spectacles and laid down my book and rose and looked at him. From moving one hand he began to move both, and then his action was the action of a person groping in the dark. Long after his eyes had opened, there was a film over them and he still felt for his way out into light. But by slow degrees his sight cleared and his hands stopped. He saw the ceiling, he saw the wall, he saw me. As his sight cleared, mine cleared too, and when at last we looked in one another's faces, I started back and I cries passionately:

"O you wicked wicked man! Your sin has found you out!"

For I knew him, the moment life looked out of his eyes, to be Mr. Edson, Jemmy's father who had so cruelly deserted Jemmy's young unmarried mother who had died in my arms, poor tender creetur, and left Jemmy to me.

"You cruel wicked man! You bad black traitor!"

With the little strength he had, he made an attempt to turn over on his wretched face to hide it. His arm dropped out of the bed and his head with it, and there he lay before me crushed in body and in mind. Surely the miserablest sight under the summer sun!

"Oh blessed Heaven," I says a crying, "teach me what to say to this broken mortal! I am a poor sinful creeter, and the judgment is not mine."

As I lifted my eyes up to the clear bright sky, I saw the high tower where Jemmy had stood above the birds, seeing that very window; and the last look of that poor pretty young mother when her soul brightened and got free, seemed to shine down from it.

"Oh man, man, man!" I says, and I went on my knees beside the bed; "if your heart is rent asunder and you are truly penitent for what you did, our Saviour will have mercy on you yet!"

As I leaned my face against the bed, his feeble hand could just move itself enough to touch me. I hope the touch was penitent. It tried to hold my dress and keep hold, but the fingers were too weak to close.

I lifted him back upon the pillows, and I says to him:

"Can you hear me?"

He looked yes.

"Do you know me?"

He looked yes, even yet more plainly.

"I am not here alone. The major is with me. You recollect the major?"

Yes. That is to say he made out yes, in the same way as before.

"And even the major and I are not alone. My grandson—his godson—is with us. Do you hear? My grandson."

The fingers made another trial to catch at my sleeve, but could only creep near it and fall.

"Do you know who my grandson is?"

Yes.

"I pitied and loved his lonely mother. When his mother lay a-dying I said to her, 'My dear, this baby is sent to a childless old woman.' He has been my pride and joy ever since. I love him as dearly as if he had drunk from my breast. Do you ask to see my grandson before you die?"

Yes.

"Show me, when I leave off speaking, if you correctly understand what I say. He has been kept unacquainted with the story of his birth. He has no knowledge of it. No suspicion of it. If I bring him here to the side of this bed, he will suppose you to be a perfect stranger. It is more than I can do, to keep from him the knowledge that there is such wrong and misery in the world; but that it was ever so near him in his innocent cradle, I have kept from him, and I do keep from him, and I ever will keep from him. For his mother's sake, and for his own."

He showed me that he distinctly understood, and the tears fell from his eyes.

"Now rest, and you shall see him."

So I got him a little wine and some brandy and I put things straight about his bed. But I began to be troubled in my mind lest Jemmy and the major might be too long of coming back. What with this occupation for my thoughts and hands, I didn't hear a foot upon the stairs, and was startled when I saw the major stopped short in the middle of the room by the eyes of the man upon the bed, and knowing him then, as I had known him a little while ago.

There was anger in the major's face, and there was horror and repugnance and I don't know what. So I went up to him and I led him to the bedside and when I clasped my hands and lifted of them up, the major did the like.

"O Lord" I says "thou knowest what we two saw together of the sufferings and sorrows of that young creeter now with thee. If this dying man is truly penitent, we two together humbly pray thee to have mercy on him!"

The major says "Amen!" and then after a little stop I whispers him, "Dear old friend fetch our beloved boy." And the major, so clever as to have got to understand it all without being told a word, went away and brought him.

Never never never shall I forget the fair bright face of our boy when he stood at the foot of the bed, looking at his unknown father. And oh so like his dear young mother then!

"Jemmy" I says, "I have found out all about this poor gentleman who is so ill, and he did lodge in the old house once. And as he wants to see all belonging to it, now that he is passing away, I sent for you."

"Ah poor man!" says Jemmy stepping forward and touching one of his hands with great gentleness. "My heart melts for him. Poor, poor man!"

The eyes that were so soon to close forever, turned to me, and I was not that strong in the pride of my strength that I could resist them.

"My darling boy, there is a reason in the secret history of this fellow-creeter, lying as the best and worst of us must all lie one day, which I think would ease his spirit in his last hour if you would lay your cheek against his forehead and say, 'May God forgive you!' "

"O gran," says Jemmy with a full heart "I am not worthy!" But he leaned down and did it. Then the faltering fingers made out to catch hold of my sleeve at last, and I believe he was a-trying to kiss me when he died.

. . . .

There my dear! There you have the story of my legacy in full, and it's worth ten times the trouble I have spent upon it if you are pleased to like it.

You might suppose that it set us against the little French town of Sens, but no we didn't find that. I found myself that I never looked up at the high tower atop of the other tower, but the days came back again when that fair young creeter with her pretty bright hair trusted in me like a mother, and the recollection made the place so peaceful to me as I can't express. And every soul about the hotel down to the pigeons in the court-yard made friends with Jemmy and the major, and went lumbering away with them on all sorts of expeditions in all sorts of vehicles drawn by rampagious cart-horses—with heads and without—mud for paint and ropes for harness—and every new friend dressed in blue like a butcher, and every new horse standing on his hind legs wanting to devour and consume every other horse, and every man that had a whip to crack crack-crack-crack-crack-cracking it as if it was a school-boy with his first. As to the major my dear that man lived the greater part of his time with a little tumbler in one hand and a bottle of small wine in the other, and whenever he saw anybody else with a little tumbler, no matter who it was—the military character with the tags, or the inn servants at their supper in the court-yard, or townspeople a-chatting on a bench, or country people a starting home after market—down rushes the major to clink his glass against their glasses and cry: Hola! Vive somebody! or Vive something! as if he was beside himself. And though I could not quite approve of the major's doing it, still the ways of the world are the ways of the world varying according to different parts of it, and dancing at all in the open square with a lady that kept a barber's shop my opinion is that the major was right to dance his best and to lead off with a power that I did not think was in him, though I was a little uneasy at the barricading sound of the cries that were set up by the other dancers and the rest of the company, until when I says "What are they ever calling out Jemmy?" Jemmy says, "They're calling out gran, bravo the military English! Bravo the military English!" which was very gratifying to my feelings as a Briton and became the name the major was known by.

But every evening at a regular time we all three sat out in the balcony of the hotel at the end of the court-yard, looking up at the golden and rosy light as it changed on the great towers, and looking at the shadows of the towers as they changed on all about us ourselves included, and what do you think we did there? My dear, if Jemmy hadn't brought some other of those stories of the major's taking down from the telling of former lodgers at 81 Norfolk Street, and if he didn't bring 'em out with this speech:

"Here you are gran! Here you are godfather! More of 'em! I'll read. And though you wrote 'em for me, godfather, I know you won't disapprove of my making 'em over to gran; will you?"

"No my dear boy," says the major. "Everything we have is hers, and we are hers."

"Hers ever affectionately and devotedly J. Jackman and J. Jackman Lirriper," cries the young rogue giving me a close hug. "Very well then godfather. Look here.

As gran is in the legacy way just now, I shall make these stories a part of gran's legacy. I'll leave 'em to her. What do you say godfather?"

"Hip hip hurrah!" says the major.

"Very well then," cries Jemmy all in a bustle. "Vive the military English! Vive the Lady Lirriper! Vive the Jemmy Jackman ditto! Vive the legacy! Now you look out, gran. And you look out, godfather. I'll read! And I'll tell you what I'll do besides. On the last night of our holiday here when we are all packed and going away, I'll top up with something of my own."

"Mind you do sir" says I.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. LIRRIPER RELATES HOW JEMMY TOPPED UP.

WELL my dear and so the evening readings of those jottings of the major's brought us round at last to the evening when we were all packed and going away next day, and I do assure you that by that time though it was deliciously comfortable to look forward to the dear old house in Norfolk Street again, I had formed quite a high opinion of the French nation and had noticed them to be much more homely and domestic in their families and far more simple and amiable in their lives than I had ever been led to expect, and it did strike me between ourselves that in one particular they might be imitated to advantage by another nation which I will not mention, and that is in the courage with which they take their little enjoyments on little means and with little things and don't let solemn big-wigs stare them out of countenance or speechify them dull, of which said solemn big-wigs I have ever had the one opinion that I wish they were all made comfortable separately in coppers with the lids on and never let out any more.

"Now young man," I says to Jemmy when we brought our chairs into the balcony that last evening, "you please to remember who was to 'top up.'"

"All right gran" says Jemmy. "I am the illustrious personage."

But he looked so serious after he had made me that light answer, that the major raised his eyebrows at me and I raised mine at the major.

"Gran and godfather," says Jemmy, "you can hardly think how much my mind has run on Mr. Edson's death."

It gave me a little check. "'Ah! It was a sad scene my love" I says, "and sad remembrances come back stronger than merry. But this" I says after a little silence, to rouse myself and the major and Jemmy all together, "is not topping up. Tell us your story my dear."

"I will" says Jemmy.

"What is the date sir?" says I. "Once upon a time when pigs drank wine?"

"No gran," says Jemmy, still serious; "once upon a time when the French drank wine."

Again I glanced at the major, and the major glanced at me.

"In short gran and godfather," says Jemmy, looking up, "the date is this time, and I'm going to tell you Mr. Edson's story."

The flutter that it threw me into! The change of color on the part of the major!

"That is to say, you understand," our bright-eyed boy says, "I am going to give you my version of it. I shall not ask whether it's right or not, firstly because you said you knew very little about it, gran, and secondly because what little you did know was a secret."

I folded my hands in my lap and I never took my eyes off Jemmy as he went running on.

"The unfortunate gentleman," Jemmy commences, "who is the subject of our present narrative was the son of somebody, and was born somewhere, and chose a profession somehow. It is not with those parts of his career that we have to deal; but with his early attachment to a young and beautiful lady."

I thought I should have dropped. I durstn't look at the major; but I knew what his state was, without looking at him.

"The father of our ill-starred hero" says Jemmy, copying as it seemed to me the style of some of his story-books, "was a worldly man who entertained ambitious views for his only son and who firmly set his face against the contemplated alliance with a virtuous but penniless orphan. Indeed he went so far as roundly to assure our hero that unless he weaned his thoughts from the object of his devoted affection, he would disinherit him. At the same time, he proposed as a suitable match the daughter of a neighboring gentleman of a good estate, who was neither ill-favored nor unamiable, and whose eligibility in a pecuniary point of view could not be disputed. But young Mr. Edson, true to the first and only love that had inflamed his breast, rejected all considerations of self-advancement, and, deprecating his father's anger in a respectful letter, ran away with her."

My dear I had begun to take a turn for the better, but when it come to running away, I began to take another turn for the worse.

"The lovers" says Jemmy "fled to London and were united at the altar of Saint Clement's Danes. And it is at this period of their simple but touching story, that we find them inmates of the dwelling of a highly respected and beloved lady of the name of Gran, residing within a hundred miles of Norfolk Street."

I felt that we were almost safe now, I felt that the dear boy had no suspicion of the bitter truth, and I looked at the major for the first time and drew a long breath. The major gave me a nod.

"Our hero's father" Jemmy goes on "proving implacable and carrying his threat into unrelenting execution, the struggles of the young couple in London were severe, and would have been far more so, but for their good angel's having conducted them to the abode of Mrs. Gran: who, divining their poverty (in spite of their endeavors to conceal it from her), by a thousand delicate arts smoothed their rough way, and alleviated the sharpness of their first distress."

Here Jemmy took one of my hands in one of his, and began a-marking the turns of his story by mak-ing me give a beat from time to time upon his other hand.

"After awhile, they left the house of Mrs. Gran, and pursued their fortunes through a variety of successes and failures elsewhere. But in all reverses, whether for good or evil, the words of Mr. Edson to the fair young partner of his life were 'Unchanging love and truth will carry us through all!' "

My hand trembled in the dear boy's, those words were so woefully unlike the fact.

"Unchanging love and truth" says Jemmy over again as if he had a proud kind of a noble pleasure in it, "will carry us through all! Those were his words. And so they fought their way, poor but gallant and happy, until Mrs. Edson gave birth to a child."

"A daughter," I says.

"No" says Jemmy, "a son. And the father was so proud of it that he could hardly bear it out of his sight. But a dark cloud overspread the scene. Mrs. Edson sickened, drooped, and died."

"Ah! Sickened, drooped, and died" I says.

"And so Mr. Edson's only comfort, only hope on earth, and only stimulus to action, was his darling boy. As the child grew older, he grew so like his mother that he was her living picture. It used to make him wonder why his father cried when he kissed him. But unhappily he was like his mother in constitution as well as in face, and he died too before he had grown out of childhood. Then Mr. Edson, who had good abilities, in his forlornness and despair threw them all to the winds. He became apathetic, reckless, lost. Little by little he sank down, down, down, down, until at last he almost lived (I think) by gaming. And so sickness overtook him in the town of Sens in France, and he lay down to die. But now that he laid him down when all was done, and looked back upon the green past beyond the time when he had covered it with ashes, he thought gratefully of the good Mrs. Gran long lost sight of who had been so kind to him and his young wife in the early days of their marriage, and he left the little that he had as a last legacy to her. And she, being brought to see him, at first no more knew him than she would know, from seeing the ruin of a Greek or Roman temple, what it used to be before it fell; but at length she remembered him. And then he told her, with tears, of his regret for the misspent part of his life, and besought her to think as mildly of it as she could, because it was the poor fallen angel of his unchanging love and constancy after all. And because she had her grandson with her, and he fancied that his own boy, if he had lived, might have grown to be something like him, he asked her to let him touch his forehead with his cheek and say certain parting words."

Jemmy's voice sank low when it got to that, and tears filled my eyes, and filled the major's.

"You little conjurer" I says, "how did you ever make it all out? Go in and write it every word down, for it's a wonder."

Which Jemmy did, and I have repeated it to you my dear from his writing.

Then the major took my hand and kissed it, and said, "Dearest madam all has prospered with us."

"Ah major" I says drying my eyes, "we needn't have been afraid. We might have known it. Treachery don't come natural to beaming youth; but trust and pity, love and constancy—they do, thank God!"

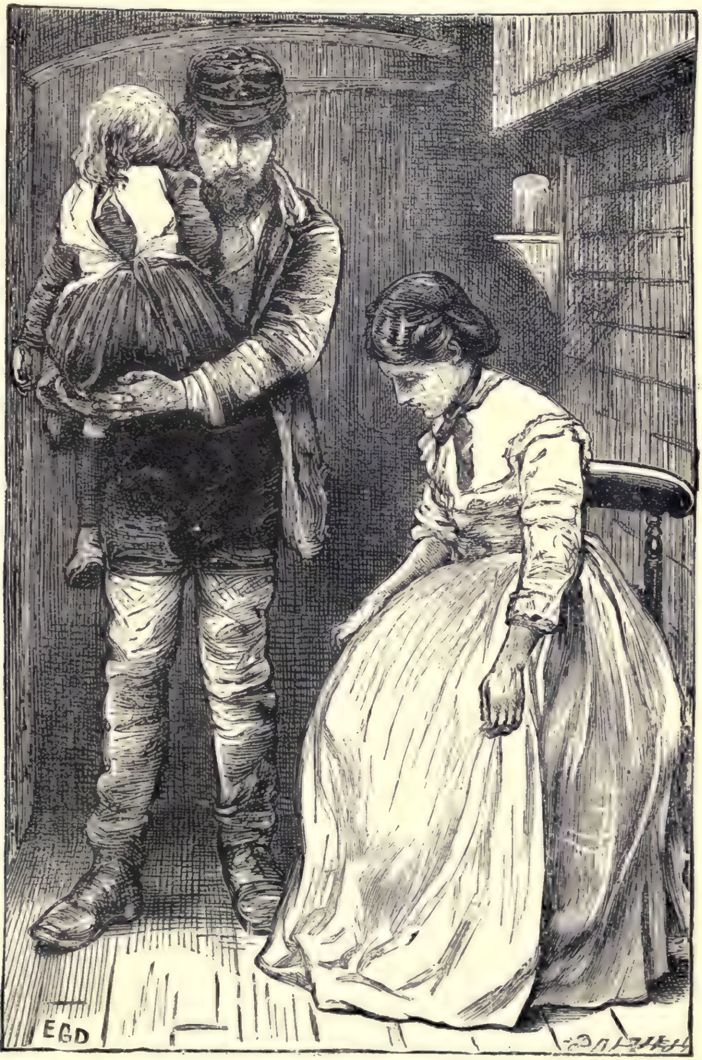
DOCTOR MARIGOLD.

I AM a Cheap Jack, and my own father's name was Willum Marigold. It was in his lifetime supposed by some that his name was William, but my own father always consistently said, No, it was Willum. On which point I content myself with looking at the argument this way: If a man is not allowed to know his own name in a free country, how much is he allowed to know in a land of slavery? As to looking at the argument through the medium of the register, Willum Marigold come into the world before registers come up much—and went out of it too. They wouldn't have been greatly in his line neither, if they had chanced to come up before him.

I was born on the queen's highway, but it was the king's at that time. A doctor was fetched to my own mother by my own father, when it took place on a common; and in consequence of his being a very kind gentleman, and accepting no fee but a tea-tray, I was named Doctor, out of gratitude and compliment to him. There you have me. Doctor Marigold.

I am at present a middle-aged man of a broadish build, in cords, leggings, and a sleeved waistcoat, the strings of which is always gone behind. Repair them how you will, they go like fiddle-strings. You have been to the theater, and you have seen one of the wiolin-players screw up his wiolin, after listening to it as if it had been whispering the secret to him that it feared it was out of order, and then you have heard it snap. That's as exactly similar to my waistcoat as a waistcoat and a wiolin can be like one another.

I am partial to a white hat, and I like a shawl round my neck wore loose and easy. Sitting down is my favorite posture. If I have a taste in point of personal jewelry, it is mother-of-pearl buttons. There you have me again, as large as life.



C. S. DOCTOR MARIGOLD.

The doctor having accepted a tea-tray, you'll guess that my father was a Cheap Jack before me. You are right. He was. It was a pretty tray. It represented a large lady going along a serpentining up-hill gravel walk to attend a little church. Two swans had likewise come astray with the same intentions. When I call her a large lady, I don't mean in point of breadth, for there she fell below my views, but she more than made it up in height; her height and slimness was—in short the height of both.

I often saw that tray, after I was the innocently smiling cause (or more likely screeching one) of the doctor's standing it upon a table against the wall in his consulting-room. Whenever my own father and mother were in that part of the country, I used to put my head (I have heard my own mother say it was flaxen curls at that time, though you wouldn't know an old hearth-broom from it now till you come to the handle and found it wasn't me) in at the doctor's door, and the doctor was always glad to see me, and said, "Aha, my brother practitioner! Come in, little M. D. How are your inclinations as to sixpence?"

You can't go on forever, you'll find, nor yet could my father nor yet my mother. If you don't go off as a whole when you are about due, you're liable to go off in part, and two to one your head's the part. Gradually my father went off his, and my mother went off hers. It was in a harmless way, but it put out the family where I boarded them. The old couple, though retired, got to be wholly and solely devoted to the Cheap Jack business, and were always selling the family off. Whenever the cloth was laid for dinner, my father began rattling the plates and dishes, as we do in our line when we put up crockery for a bid, only he had lost the trick of it, and mostly let 'em drop and broke 'em. As the old lady had been used to sit in the cart, and hand the articles out one by one to the old gentleman on the foot-board to sell, just in the same way she handed him every item of the family's property, and they disposed of it in their own imaginations from morning to night. At last the old gentleman, lying bedridden in the same room with the old lady, cries out in the old patter, fluent, after having been silent for two days and nights: "Now, here, my jolly companions every one—which the Nightingale Club in a village was held, at the sign of the Cabbage and Shears, where the singers no doubt would have greatly excelled, but for want of taste, voices, and ears—now, here, my jolly companions every one, is a working model of a used-up old Cheap Jack, without a tooth in his head, and with a pain in every bone; so like life that it would be just as good if it wasn't better, just as bad if it wasn't worse, and just as new if it wasn't worn out. Bid for the working model of the old Cheap Jack, who has drunk more gunpowder tea with the ladies in his time than would blow the lid off a washerwoman's copper, and carry it as many thousands of miles higher than the moon as naught nix naught, divided by the national debt, carry nothing to the poor rates, three under and two over. Now, my hearts of oak and men of straw, what do you say for the lot? Two shillings, a shilling, tenpence, eightpence, sixpence, fourpence. Twopence? Who said twopence! The gentleman in the scarecrow's hat? I am ashamed of the gentleman in the scarecrow's hat. I really am ashamed of him for his want of public spirit. Now I'll tell you what I'll do with you. Come! I'll throw you in a working model of a old woman that was married to the old Cheap Jack so long ago that upon my word and honor it took place in Noah's ark, before the unicorn could get in to forbid the banns by blowing a tune upon his horn. There now! Come! What do you say for both? I'll tell you what I'll do with you. I don't bear you malice for being so backward. Here! If you make me a bid that'll only reflect a little credit on your town, I'll throw you in a warming-pan for nothing and lend you a toasting-fork for life. Now come; what do you say after that splendid offer? Say two pound, say thirty shillings, say a pound, say ten shillings, say five, say two and six? You don't say even two and six? You say two and three? No. You shan't have the lot for two and three. I'd sooner give it you, if you was good-looking enough. Here! Missis! Chuck the old man and woman into the cart, put the horse to, and drive 'em away and bury 'em!" Such were the last words of Willum Marigold, my own father, and they were carried out, by him and by his wife, my own mother, on one and the same day, as I ought to know, having followed as mourner.

My father had been a lovely one in his time at the Cheap Jack work, as his dying observations went to prove. But I top him. I don't say it because it's myself, but because it has been universally acknowledged by all that has had the means of comparison. I have worked at it. I have measured myself against other public speakers—members of Parliament, platforms, pulpits, counsel learned in the law—and where I have found 'em good, I have took a bit of imagination from 'em, and where I have found 'em bad, I have let 'em alone. Now I'll tell you what. I mean to go down into my grave declaring that of all the callings ill used in Great Britain, the Cheap Jack calling is the worst used. Why ain't we a profession? Why ain't we endowed with privileges? Why are we forced to take out a hawker's license, when no such thing is expected of the political hawkers? Where's the difference betwixt us? Except that we are Cheap Jacks and they are Dear jacks, I don't see any difference but what's in our favor.

For look here! Say it's election time. I am on the foot-board of my cart in the market-place on a Saturday night. I put up a general miscellaneous lot. I say: "Now here, my free and independent woters, I'm a-going to give you such a chance as you never had in all your born days, nor yet the days preceding. Now I'll show you what I'm a-going to do with you. Here's a pair of razors that'll shave you closer than the board of guardians; here's a flat-iron worth its weight in gold; here's a frying-pan artificially flavored with essence of beefsteaks to that degree that you've only got for the rest of your lives to fry bread and dripping in it and there you are replete with animal food; here's a genuine chronometer watch in such a solid silver case that you may knock at the door with it when you come home late from a social meeting, and rouse your wife and family, and save up your knocker for the postman; and here's half a dozen dinner-plates that you may play the cymbals with to charm the baby when it's fractious. Stop! I'll throw you in another article, and I'll give you that, and it's a rolling-pin; and if the baby can only get it well into its mouth when its teeth is coming and rub the gums once with it, they'll come through double, in a fit of laughter equal to being tickled. Stop again! I'll throw you in another article, because I don't like the looks of you, for you haven't the appearance of buyers unless I lose by you, and because I'd rather lose than not take money to-night, and that's a looking-glass in which you may see how ugly you look when you don't bid! What do you say now? Come! Do you say a pound? Not you, for you haven't got it. Do you say ten shillings? Not you, for you owe more to the tallyman. Well, then, I'll tell you what I'll do with you. I'll heap 'em all on the foot-board of the cart—there they are! razors, flat-iron, frying-pan, chronometer watch, dinner-plates, rolling-pin, and looking-glass—take 'em all away for four shillings, and I'll give you sixpence for your trouble!" This is me, the Cheap Jack. But on the Monday morning, in the same market-place, comes the Dear Jack on the hustings—his cart—and what does he say? "Now my free and independent woters, I am a-going to give you such a chance" (he begins just like me) "as you never had in all your born days, and that's the chance of sending myself to Parliament. Now I'll tell you what I am a-going to do for you. Here's the interests of this magnificent town promoted above all the rest of the civilized and uncivilized earth. Here's your railways carried, and your neighbors' railways jockeyed. Here's all your sons in the post-office. Here's Britannia smiling on you. Here's the eyes of Europe on you. Here's uniwersal prosperity for you, repletion of animal food, golden corn-fields, gladsome homesteads, and rounds of applause from your own hearts, all in one lot, and that's myself. Will you take me as I stand? You won't? Well, then, I'll tell you what I'll do with you. Come now! I'll throw you in anything you ask for. There! Church rates, abolition of church rates, more malt tax, no malt tax, uniwersal education to the highest mark, or uniwersal ignorance to the lowest, total abolition of flogging in the army or a dozen for every private once a month all round. Wrongs of men or rights of women—only say which it shall be, take 'em or leave 'em, and I'm of your opinion altogether, and the lot's your own on your own terms. There! You won't take it yet? Well, then, I'll tell you what I'll do with you. Come! You are such free and independent woters, and I am so proud of you—you are such a noble and enlightened constituency, and I am so ambitious of the honor and dignity of being your member, which is by far the highest level to which the wings of the human mind can soar—that I'll tell you what I'll do with you. I'll throw you in all the public-houses in your magnificent town for nothing. Will that content you? It won't? You won't take the lot yet? Well, then, before I put the horse in and drive away, and make the offer to the next most magnificent town that can be discovered, I'll tell you what I'll do. Take the lot, and I'll drop £2,000 in the streets of your magnificent town for them to pick up that can. Not enough? Now look here. This is the very furthest that I'm a going to. I'll make it twenty-five hundred. And still you won't? Here, missis! Put the horse—no, stop half a moment, I shouldn't like to turn my back upon you neither for a trifle. I'll make it £2,750. There! Take the lot on your own terms, and I'll count out £2,750 on the foot-board of the cart, to be dropped in the streets of your magnificent town for them to pick up that can. What do you say? Come now! You won't do better, and you may do worse. You take it? Hooray! Sold again and got the seat!"

These Dear Jacks soap the people shameful, but we Cheap Jacks don't. We tell 'em the truth about themselves to their faces, and scorn to court 'em. As to wenturesomeness in the way of puffing up the lots, the Dear Jacks beat us hollow. It is considered in the Cheap Jack calling that better patter can be made out of a gun than any article we put up from the cart, except a pair of spectacles. I often hold forth about a gun for a quarter of an hour, and feel as if I need never leave off. But when I tell 'em what the gun can do, and what the gun has brought down, I never go half so far as the Dear Jacks do when they make speeches in praise of their guns—their great guns that set 'em on to do it. Besides, I'm in business for myself; I ain't sent down into the market-place to order, as they are. Besides, again, my guns don't know what I say in their laudation, and their guns do, and the whole concern of 'em have reason to be sick and ashamed all round. These are some of my arguments for declaring that the Cheap Jack calling is treated ill in Great Britain, and for turning warm when I think of the other Jacks in question setting themselves up to pretend to look down upon it.

I courted my wife from the foot-board of the cart. I did indeed. She was a Suffolk young woman, and it was in Ipswich market-place right opposite the corn-chandler's shop. I had noticed her up at a window last Saturday that was, appreciating highly. I had took to her, and I had said to myself, "If not already disposed of I'll have that lot." Next Saturday that come I pitched the cart on the same pitch, and I was in very high feather indeed, keeping 'em laughing the whole of the time, and getting off the goods briskly. At last I took out of my waistcoat-pocket a small lot wrapped in soft paper, and I put it this way (looking up at the window where she was). "Now here, my blooming English maidens, is an article, the last article of the present evening's sale, which I offer to only you, the lovely Suffolk dumplings biling over with beauty, and I won't take a bid of £1,000 for it from any man alive. Now what is it? Why, I'll tell you what it is. It's made of fine gold, and it's not broke, though there's a hole in the middle of it, and it's stronger than any fetter that ever was forged, though it's smaller than any finger in my set of ten. Why ten? Because when my parents made over my property to me, I tell you true, there was twelve sheets, twelve towels, twelve table-cloths, twelve knives, twelve forks, twelve table-spoons, and twelve tea-spoons, but my set of fingers was two short of a dozen, and could never since be matched. Now what else is it? Come, I'll tell you. It's a hoop of solid gold, wrapped in a silver curl-paper that I myself took off the shining locks of the ever beautiful old lady in Threadneedle Street, London city; I wouldn't tell you so if I hadn't the paper to show, or you mightn't believe it even of me. Now what else is it? It's a man-trap and a hand cuff, the parish stocks and a leglock, all in gold and all in one. Now what else is it? It's a wedding-ring. Now I'll tell you what I'm a-going to do with it. I'm not a-going to offer this lot for money; but I mean to give it to the next of you beauties that laughs, and I'll pay her a visit to-morrow morning at exactly half-after nine o'clock as the chimes go, and I'll take her out for a walk to put up the banns." She laughed and got the ring handed up to her. When I called in the morning she says, "Oh, dear! It's never you, and you never mean it?" "It's ever me," says I, "and I am ever yours, and I ever mean it." So we got married, after being put up three times—which, by the bye, is quite in the Cheap Jack way again, and shows once more how the Cheap Jack customs perwade society.

She wasn't a bad wife, but she had a temper. If she could have parted with that one article at a sacrifice, I wouldn't have swopped her away in exchange for any other woman in England. Not that I ever did swop her away, for we lived together till she died, and that was thirteen year. Now, my lords and ladies and gentlefolks all, I'll let you into a secret, though you won't believe it. Thirteen year of temper in a palace would try the worst of you, but thirteen year of temper in a cart would try the best of you. You are kept so very close to it in a cart, you see. There's thousands of couples among you getting on like sweet ile upon a whetstone in houses five and six pairs of stairs high, that would go to the divorce court in a cart. Whether the jolting makes it worse, I don't undertake to decide; but in a cart it does come home to you, and stick to you. Wiolence in a cart is so wiolent, and aggrawation in a cart is so aggrawating.

We might have had such a pleasant life! A roomy cart, with the large goods hung outside, and the bed slung underneath it when on the road, an iron pot and a kettle, a fire-place for the cold weather, a chimney for the smoke, a hanging shelf and a cupboard, a dog, and a horse. What more do you want? You draw off upon a bit of turf in a green lane or by the roadside, you hobble your old horse and turn him grazing, you light your fire upon the ashes of the last visitors, you cook your stew, and you wouldn't call the Emperor of France your father. But have a temper in the cart, flinging language and the hardest goods in stock at you, and where are you then? Put a name to your feelings.

My dog knew as well when she was on the turn as I did. Before she broke out, he would give a howl and bolt. How he knew it was a mystery to me; but the sure and certain knowledge of it would waken him up out of his soundest sleep, and he would give a howl and bolt. At such times I wished I was him.

The worst of it was, we had a daughter born to us, and I love children with all my heart. When she was in her furies she beat the child. This got to be so shocking, as the child got to be four or five years old, that I have many a time gone on with my whip over my shoulder, at the old horse's head, sobbing and crying worse than ever little Sophy did. For how could I prewent it? Such a thing is not to be tried with such a temper—in a cart—without coming to a fight. It's in the natural size and formation of a cart to bring it to a fight. And then the poor child got worse terrified than before, as well as worse hurt generally, and her mother made complaints to the next people we lighted on, and the word went round, "Here's a wretch of a Cheap Jack been a-beating his wife."

Little Sophy was such a brave child! She grew to be quite devoted to her poor father, though he could do so little to help her. She had a wonderful quantity of shining dark hair, all curling natural about her. It is quite astonishing to me now that I didn't go tearing mad when I used to see her run from her mother before the cart, and her mother catch her by this hair, and pull her down by it and beat her.

Such a brave child I said she was! Ah! with reason.

"Don't you mind next time, father dear," she would whisper to me, with her little face still flushed and her bright eyes still wet; "if I don't cry out, you may know I am not much hurt. And even if I do cry out, it will only be to get mother to let go and leave off." What I have seen the little spirit bear—for me—without crying out!

Yet in other respects her mother took great care of her. Her clothes were always clean and neat, and her mother was never tired of working at 'em. Such is the inconsistency in things. Our being down in the marsh country in unhealthy weather, I consider the cause of Sophy's taking bad low fever; but however she took it, once she got it she turned away from her mother forevermore, and nothing would persuade her to be touched by her mother's hand. She would shiver and say, "No, no, no," when it was offered and would hide her face on my shoulder and hold me tighter round the neck.

The Cheap Jack business had been worse than ever I had known it, what with one thing and what with another (and not least what with railroads, which will cut it all to pieces, I expect, at last), and I was run dry of money. For which reason, one night at that period of little Sophy's being so bad, either we must have come to a deadlock for victuals and drink, or I must have pitched the cart as I did.

I couldn't get the dear child to lie down or leave go of me, and indeed I hadn't the heart to try, so I stepped out on the foot-board with her holding round my neck. They all set up a laugh when they see us, and one chuckle-headed Joskin (that I hated for it) made the bidding, "Tuppence for her!"

"'Now, you country boobies," says I, feeling as if my heart was a heavy weight at the end of a broken sash-line, "I give you notice that I am a-going to charm the money out of your pockets, and to give you so much more than your money's worth that you'll only persuade yourselves to draw your Saturday night's wages ever again arterwards by the hopes of meeting me to lay 'em out with, which you never will, and why not? Because I've made my fortune by selling my goods on a large scale for seventy-five per cent. less than I give for 'em, and I am consequently to be elewated to the House of Peers next week, by the title of the Duke of Cheap and Markis Jackaloorul. Now let's know what you want to-night, and you shall have it. But first of all, shall I tell you why I have got this little girl round my neck? You don't want to know? Then you shall. She belongs to the fairies. She's a fortune-teller. She can tell me all about you in a whisper, and can put me up to whether you're a-going to buy a lot or leave it. Now do you want a saw? No, she says you don't, because you're too clumsy to use one. Else here's a saw which would be a lifelong blessing to a handy man, at four shillings, at three and six, at three, at two and six, at two, at eighteenpence. But none of you shall have it at any price, on account of your well-known awkwardness, which would make it manslaughter. The same objection applies to this set of three planes which I won't let you have neither, so don't bid for 'em. Now I am a going to ask her what you do want." (Then I whispered, "Your head burns so that I am afraid it hurts you bad, my pet," and she answered, without opening her heavy eyes, "Just a little, father.") "Oh! This little fortune-teller says it's a memorandum-book you want. Then why didn't you mention it? Here it is. Look at it. Two hundred superfine hot-pressed wire-wove pages—if you don't believe me, count 'em—ready ruled for your expenses, an everlastingly pointed pencil to put 'em down with, a double-bladed penknife to scratch 'em out with, a book of printed tables to calculate your income with, and a camp-stool to sit down upon while you give your mind to it! Stop! And an umbrella to keep the moon off when you give your mind to it on a pitch-dark night. Now I won't ask you how much for the lot, but how little? How little you are thinking of? Don't be ashamed to mention it, because my fortune-teller knows already." (Then making believe to whisper, I kissed her, and she kissed me.) "Why, she says, you're thinking of as little as three and threepence! I couldn't have believed it, even of you, unless she told me. Three and threepence! And a set of printed tables in the lot that'll calculate your income up to forty thousand a year! With an income of forty thousand a year, you grudge three and sixpence. Well, then, I'll tell you my opinion. I so despise the threepence that I'd sooner take three shillings. There. For three shillings, three shillings, three shillings! Gone. Hand 'em over to the lucky man."

As there had been no bid at all, everybody looked about and grinned at everybody, while I touched little Sophy's face, and asked her if she felt faint or giddy. "Not very, father. It will soon be over." Then turning from the pretty patient eyes, which were opened now, and seeing nothing but grins across my lighted greasepot, I went on again in my Cheap Jack style. "Where's the butcher?" (My sorrowful eye had just caught sight of a fat young butcher on the outside of the crowd.) "She says the good luck is the butcher's. Where is he?" Everybody handed on the blushing butcher to the front, and there was a roar, and the butcher felt obliged to put his hand in his pocket and take the lot. The party so picked out, in general, does feel obliged to take the lot—good four times out of six. Then we had another lot, the counterpart of that one, and sold it sixpence cheaper, which is always wery much enjoyed. Then we had the spectacles. It ain't a special profitable lot, but I put 'em on, and I see what the chancellor of the exchequer is going to take off the taxes, and I see what the sweetheart of the young woman in the shawl is doing at home, and I see what the bishop has got for dinner, and a deal more that seldom fails to fetch 'em up in their spirits; and the better their spirits the better their bids. Then we had the ladies' lot,—the teapot, tea-caddy, glass sugar-basin, half a dozen spoons, and a caudle-cup—and all the time I was making similar excuses to give a look or two and say a word or two to my poor child. It was while the second ladies' lot was holding 'em enchained that I felt her lift herself a little on my shoulder, to look across the dark street. "What troubles you, darling?" "Nothing troubles me, father. I am not at all troubled. But don't I see a pretty churchyard over there?" "Yes, my dear." "Kiss me twice, dear father, and lay me down to rest upon that churchyard grass so soft and green." I staggered back into the cart with her head dropped on my shoulder, and I says to her mother, "Quick. Shut the door! Don't let those laughing people see!" "What's the matter?" she cries. "O woman, woman," I tells her, "you'll never catch my little little Sophy by her hair again, for she has flown away from you!"

Maybe those were harder words than I meant 'em; but from that time forth my wife took to brooding, and would sit in the cart or walk beside it hours at a stretch, with her arms crossed and her eyes looking on the ground. When her furies took her (which was rather seldomer than before) they took her in a new way, and she banged herself about to that extent that I was forced to hold her. She got none the better for a little drink now and then, and through some years I used to wonder, as I plodded along at the old horse's head, whether there was many carts upon the road that held so much dreariness as mine, for all my being looked up to as the king of the Cheap Jacks. So sad our lives went on till one summer evening, when as we were coming into Exeter out of the further west of England, we saw a woman beating a child in a cruel manner, who screamed: "Don't beat me! Oh, mother, mother, mother!" Then my wife stopped her ears, and ran away like a wild thing, and next day she was found in the river.

Me and my dog were all the company left in the cart now; and the dog learned to give a short bark when they wouldn't bid, and to give another and a nod of his head when I asked him, "Who said half a crown? Are you the gentleman, sir, that offered half a crown?" He attained to an immense height of popularity, and I shall always believe taught himself entirely out of his own head to growl at any person in the crowd that bid as low as sixpence. But he got to be well on in years, and one night when I was conwulsing York with the spectacles, he took a conwulsion on his own account upon the wery foot-board by me, and it finished him.

Being naturally of a tender turn, I had dreadful lonely feelings on me arter this. I conquered 'em at selling times, having a reputation to keep (not to mention keeping myself), but they got me down in private and rolled upon me. That's often the way with us public characters. See us on the foot-board, and you'd give pretty well anything you possess to be us. See us off the foot-board, and you'd add a trifle to be off your bargain. It was under those circumstances that I come acquainted with a giant. I might have been too high to fall into conversation with him had it not been for my lonely feelings. For the general rule is, going round the country, to draw the line at dressing up. When a man can't trust his getting a living to his undisguised abilities, you consider him below your sort. And this giant when on view figured as a Roman.

He was a languid young man, which I attribute to the distance betwixt his extremities. He had a little head and less in it, he had weak eyes and weak knees, and altogether you couldn't look at him without feeling that there was greatly too much of him both for his joints and his mind. But he was an amiable though timid young man (his mother let him out and spent the money), and we come acquainted when he was walking to ease the horse betwixt two fairs. He was called Rinaldo di Velasco, his name being Pickleson.

This giant, otherwise Pickleson, mentioned to me under the seal of confidence that, beyond his being a burden to himself, his life was made a burden to him by the cruelty of his master toward a stepdaughter who was deaf and dumb. Her mother was dead, and she had no living soul to take her part, and was used most hard. She traveled with his master's caravan only because there was nowhere to leave her, and this giant, otherwise Pickleson, did go so far as to believe that his master often tried to lose her. He was such a wery languid young man that I don't know how long it didn't take him to get this story out, but it passed through his defective circulation to his top extremity in course of time.

When I heard this account from the giant, otherwise

Pickleson, and likewise that the poor girl had beautiful long dark hair, and was often pulled down by it and beaten, I couldn't see the giant through what stood in my eyes. Having wiped 'em, I gave him a sixpence (for he was kept as short as he was long), and he laid it out in two threepenn'orths of gin-and-water, which so brisked him up that he sang the favorite comic of "Shivery Shakey, Ain't it Cold?"—a popular effect which his master had tried every other means to get out of him as a Roman wholly in vain.

His master's name was Mim, a wery hoarse man, and I knew him to speak to. I went to that fair as a mere civilian, leaving the cart outside the town, and I looked about the back of the wans while the performing was going on, and at last, sitting dozing against a muddy cart-wheel, I come upon the poor girl who was deaf and dumb. At the first look I might almost have judged that she had escaped from the wild-beast show; but at the second I thought better of her, and thought that if she was more cared for and more kindly used she would be like my child. She was just the same age that my own daughter would have been, if her pretty head had not fell down upon my shoulder that unfortunate night.

To cut it short, I spoke confidential to Mim while he was beating the gong outside betwixt two lots of Pickleson's publics, and I put it to him, "She lies heavy on your own hands; what'll you take for her?" Mim was a most ferocious swearer. Suppressing that part of his reply, which was much the longest part, his reply was, "A pair of braces." "Now I'll tell you," says I, "what I'm going to do with you. I'm going to fetch you half a dozen pair of the primest braces in the cart, and then to take her away with me." Says Mim (again ferocious), "I'll believe it when I've got the goods, and no sooner." I made all the haste I could, lest he should think twice of it, and the bargain was completed, which Pickleson he was hereby so relieved in his mind that he come out at his little back door, longways like a serpent, and give us" Shivery Shakey in a whisper among the wheels at parting.

It was happy days for both of us when Sophy and me began to travel in the cart. I at once gave her the name of Sophy, to put her ever toward me in the attitude of my own daughter. We soon made out to begin to understand one another, through the goodness of the heavens, when she knowed that I meant true and kind by her. In a wery little time she was wonderful fond of me. You have no idea what it is to have anybody wonderful fond of you, unless you have been got down and rolled upon by the lonely feelings that I have mentioned as having once got the better of me.

You'd have laughed—or the rewerse—it's according to your disposition—if you could have seen me trying to teach Sophy. At first I was helped—you'd never guess by what—milestones. I got some large alphabets in a box, all the letters separate on bits of bone, and say we was going to Wndsor, I give her those letters in that order, and then at every milestone I showed her those same letters in that same order again, and pointed toward the abode of royalty. Another time I give her cart, and then chalked the same upon the cart. Another time I give her Doctor Marigold, and hung a corresponding inscription outside my waistcoat. People that met us might stare a bit and laugh, but what did I care, if she caught the idea? She caught it after long patience and trouble, and then we did begin to get on swimmingly, I believe you! At first she was a little given to consider me the cart, and the cart the abode of royalty, but that soon wore off.

We had our signs, too, and they was hundreds in number. Sometimes she would sit looking at me and considering hard how to communicate with me about something fresh—how to ask me what she wanted explained—and then she was (or I thought she was; what does it signify?) so like my child with those years added to her that I half-believed it was herself, trying to tell me where she had been to up in the skies, and what she had seen since that unhappy night when she flied away. She had a pretty face, and now that there was no one to drag at her bright dark hair, and it was all in order, there was a something touching in her looks that made the cart most peaceful and most quiet, though not at all melancholy. (N. B. In the Cheap Jack patter, we generally sound it lemonjolly, and it gets a laugh.)

The way she learned to understand any look of mine was truly surprising. When I sold of a night, she would sit in the cart unseen by them outside, and would give a eager look into my eyes when I looked in, and would hand me straight the precise article or articles I wanted. And then she would clap her hands and laugh for joy. And as for me, seeing her so bright and remembering what she was when I first lighted on her, starved and beaten and ragged, leaning asleep against the muddy cartwheel, it give me such heart that I gained a greater height of reputation than ever, and I put Pickleson down (by the name of Mim's Traveling Giant otherwise Pickleson) for a fypunnote in my will.

This happiness went on in the cart till she was sixteen year old. By which time I began to feel not satisfied that I had done my whole duty by her, and to consider that she ought to have better teaching than I could give her. It drew a many tears on both sides when I commenced explaining my views to her; but what's right is right, and you can't neither by tears nor laughter do away with its character.

So I took her hand in mine, and I went with her one day to the Deaf and Dumb Establishment in London, and when the gentleman come to speak to us, I says to him: "Now I'll tell you what I'll do with you, sir. I am nothing but a Cheap Jack, but of late years I have laid by for a rainy day notwithstanding. This is my only daughter (adopted), and you can't produce a deafer nor a dumber. Teach her the most that can be taught her in the shortest separation that can be named—state the figure for it—and I am game to put the money down. I won't bate you a single farthing, sir, but I'll put down the money here and now, and I'll thankfully throw you in a pound to take it. There!" The gentleman smiled, and then, "Well, well," says he, "I must first know what she has learned already. How do you communicate with her?" Then I showed him, and she wrote in printed writing many names of things and so forth; and we held some sprightly conversation, Sophy and me, about a little story in a book which the gentleman showed her, and which she was able to read. "This is most extraordinary," says the gentleman; "is it possible that you have been her only teacher?" "I have been her only teacher, sir," I says, "besides herself." "Then," says the gentleman, and more acceptable words was never spoke to me, "you're a clever fellow and a good fellow." This he makes known to Sophy, who kisses his hands, claps her own, and laughs and cries upon it.

We saw the gentleman four times in all, and when he took down my name and asked how in the world it ever chanced to be Doctor, it come out that he was own nephew by the sister's side, if you'll believe me, to the very doctor that I was called after. This made our footing still easier, and he says to me:

"Now, Marigold, tell me what more do you want your adopted daughter to know."

"I want her, sir, to be cut off from the world as little as can be, considering her deprivations, and therefore to be able to read whatever is wrote with perfect ease and pleasure."

"My good fellow," urges the gentleman, opening his eyes wide, "why, I can't do that myself!"

I took his joke and give him a laugh (knowing by experience how flat you fall without it), and I mended my words accordingly.

"What do you mean to do with her afterward?" asks the gentleman, with a sort of a doubtful eye. "To take her about the country?"

"In the cart, sir, but only in the cart. She will live a private life, you understand, in the cart. I should never think of bringing her infirmities before the public. I wouldn't make a show for any money."

The gentleman nodded and seemed to approve.

"Well," says he, "can you part with her for two years?"

"To do her that good—yes, sir."

"There's another question," says the gentleman, looking toward her—"can she part with you for two years?"

I don't know that it was a harder matter of itself (for the other was hard enough to me), but it was harder to get over. However, she was pacified to it at last, and the separation betwixt us was settled. How it cut up both of us when it took place, and when I left her at the door in the dark of an evening, I don't tell. But I know this: remembering that night, I shall never pass that same establishment without a heartache and a swelling in the throat; and I couldn't put you up the best of lots in sight of it with my usual spirit—no, not even the gun nor the pair of spectacles—for £500 reward from the Secretary of State for the Home Department, and throw in the honor of putting my legs under his mahogany afterward.

Still the loneliness that followed in the cart was not the old loneliness, because there was a term put to it, however long to look forward to; and because I could think, when I was anyways down, that she belonged to me and I belonged to her. Always planning for her coming back, I bought in a few months' time another cart, and what do you think I planned to do with it? I'll tell you. I planned to fit it up with shelves and books for her reading, and to have a seat in it where I could sit and see her read, and think that I had been her first teacher. Not hurrying over the job, I had the fittings knocked together in contriving ways under my own inspection, and here was her bed in a berth with curtains, and there was her reading-table, and here her writing-desk, and elsewhere was her books in rows upon rows, picters and no picters, bindings and no bindings, gilt-edged and plain, just as I could pick 'em up for her in lots up and down the country, north and south and west and east, winds liked best and winds liked least, here and there and gone astray, over hills and far away. And when I had got together pretty well as many books as the cart would neatly hold, a new scheme come into my head, which, as it turned out, kept my time and attention a good deal employed and helped me over the two years' stile.

Without being of an awaricious temper, I like to be the owner of things. I shouldn't wish, for instance, to go partners with yourself in the Cheap Jack cart. It's not that I mistrust you, but that I'd rather know it was mine. Similarly, very likely you'd rather know it was yours. Well! A kind of a jealousy began to creep into my mind when I reflected that all those books would have been read by other people long before they was read by her. It seemed to take away from her being the owner of 'em like. In this way, the question got into my head: Couldn't I have a book new-made express for her, which she should be the first to read?

It pleased me, that thought did; and as I never was a man to let a thought sleep (you must wake up all the whole family of thoughts you've got and burn their nightcaps, or you won't do in the Cheap Jack line), I set to work at it. Considering that I was in the habit of changing so much about the country, and that I should have to find out a literary character here to make a deal with, and another literary character there to make a deal with, as opportunities presented, I hit on the plan that this same book should be a general miscellaneous lot—like the razors, flat-irons, chronometer watch, dinner-plates, rolling-pin, and looking-glass—and shouldn't be offered as a single indiwidual article, like the spectacles or the gun. When I had come to that conclusion, I come to another, which shall likewise be yours.

Often had I regretted that she never had heard me on the footboard, and that she never could hear me. It ain't that I am wain, but that you don't like to put your own light under a bushel. What's the worth of your reputation, if you can't conwey the reason for it to the person you most wish to walue it? Now I'll put it to you. Is it worth sixpence, fippence, fourpence, threepence, twopence, a penny, a halfpenny, a farthing? No, it ain't. Not worth a farthing. Very well, then. My conclusion was that I would begin her book with some account of myself. So that, through reading a specimen or two of me on the board, she might form an idea of my merits there. I was aware that I couldn't do myself justice. A man can't write his eye (at least I don't know how to), nor yet can a man write his woice, nor the rate of his talk, nor the quickness of his action, nor his general spicy way. But he can write his turns of speech, when he is a public speaker—and indeed I have heard that he wery often does before he speaks 'em.

Well! Having formed that resolution, then come the question of a name. How did I hammer that hot iron into shape? This way. The most difficult explanation I had ever had with her was, how I come to be called Doctor, and yet was no doctor. After all, I felt that I had failed of getting it correctly into her mind, with my utmost pains. But trusting to her improvement in the two years, I thought that I might trust to her understanding it when she should come to read it as put down by my own hand. Then I thought I would try a joke with her and watch how it took, by which of itself I might fully judge of her understanding it. We had first discovered the mistake we had dropped into, through her having asked me to prescrbie for her when she had supposed me to be a doctor in a medical point of view; so thinks I, "Now, if I give this book the name of my prescriptions, and if she catches the idea that my only prescriptions are for her amusement and interest—to make her laugh in a pleasant way, or to make her cry in a pleasant way—it will be a delightful proof to both of us that we have got over our difficulty. It fell out to absolute perfection. For when she saw the book, as I had it got up—the printed and pressed book—lying on her desk in her cart, and saw the title "Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions," she looked at me for a moment with astonishment, then fluttered the leaves, then broke out a-laughing in the charmingest way, then felt her pulse and shook her head, then turned the pages pretending to read them most attentive, then kissed the book to me, and put it to her bosom with both her hands. I never was better pleased in all my life!

But let me not anticipate. (I take that expression out of a lot of romances I bought for her. I never opened a single one of 'em—and I have opened many—but I found the romancer saying "let me not anticipate." Which being so, I wonder why he did anticipate, or who asked him to do it). Let me not, I say, anticipate. This same book took up all my spare time. It was no play to get the other articles together in the general miscellaneous lot, but when it come to my own article! There! I couldn't have believed the blotting, nor yet the buckling to at it, nor the patience over it. Which again is like the footboard. The public have no idea.

At last it was done, and the two years' time was gone after all the other time before it, and where it's all gone to, who knows? The new cart was finished—yellow outside, relieved with wermilion and brass fittings—the old horse was put in it, a new 'un and a boy being laid on for the Cheap Jack cart—and I cleaned myself up to go and fetch her. Bright cold weather it was, cart-chimneys smoking, carts pitched private on a piece of waste ground over at Wandsworth, where you may see 'em from the Sou'western Railway when not upon the road. (Look out of the right-hand window going down.)

"Marigold," says the gentleman, giving his hand heartily, "I am very glad to see you."

"Yet I have my doubts, sir," says I, "if you can be half as glad to see me as I am to see you."

"The time has appeared so long—has it, Marigold?"

"I won't say that, sir, considering its real length; but——"

"What a start, my good fellow!"

Ah! I should think it was! Grown such a woman, so pretty, so intelligent, so expressive! I knew then that she must be really like my child, or I could never have known her, standing quiet by the door.

"You are affected," says the gentleman in a kindly manner.

"I feel, sir," says I, "that I am but a rough chap in a sleeved waistcoat."

"I feel," says the gentleman, "that it was you who raised her from misery and degradation, and brought her into communication with her kind. But why do we conwerse alone together, when we can conwerseso well with her? Address her in your own way."

"I am such a rough chap in a sleeved waistcoat, sir," says I, "and she is such a graceful woman, and she stands so quiet at the door!"

"Try if she moves at the old sign," says the gentleman.

They had got it up together o' purpose to please me! For when I give her the old sign, she rushed to my feet and dropped upon her knees, holding up her hands to me with pouring tears of love and joy; and when I took her hands and lifted her, she clasped me round the neck and lay there; and I don't know what a fool I didn't make of myself, until we all three settled down into talking without sound, as if there was a something soft and pleasant spread over the whole world for us.

So every item of my plan was crowned with success. Our reunited life was more than all that we had looked forward to. Content and joy went with us as the wheels of the two carts went round, and the same stopped with us when the two carts stopped. I was as pleased and as proud as a pug-dog with his muzzle black-leaded for a evening party, and his tail extra curled by machinery.

But I had left something out of my calculations. Now, what had I left out? To help you to a guess, I'll say a figure. Come. Make a guess, and guess right. Naught? No. Nine? No. Eight? No. Seven? No. Six? No. Five? No. Four? No. Three? No. Two? No. One? No. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do with you. I'll say it's another sort of figure altogether. There. Why, then, says you, it's a mortal figure. No, nor yet a mortal figure. By such means you get yourself penned into a corner, and you can't help guessing a immortal figure. That's about it. Why didn't you say so sooner?

Yes. It was a immortal figure that I had altogether left out of my calculations. Neither man's nor woman's, but a child's. Girl's or boy's? Boy's. "I, says the sparrow, with my bow and arrow." Now you have got it.

We were down at Lancaster, and I had done two nights more than fair average business (though I cannot in honor recommend them as a quick audience) in the open square there, near the end of the street where Mr. Sly's King's Arms and Royal Hotel stands. Mim's traveling giant, otherwise Pickleson, happened at the self-same time to be a-trying it on in the town. The genteel lay was adopted with him. No hint of a wan. Green baize alcove leading up to Pickleson in a auction room. Printed poster, "Free list suspended, with the exception of that proud boast of an enlightened country, a free press. Schools admitted by private arrangement. Nothing to raise a blush in the cheek of youth or shock the most fastidious." Mim swearing most horrible and terrific, in a pink calico payplace, at the slackness of the public. Serious handbill in the shops, importing that it was almost impossible to come to a right understanding of the history of David without seeing Pickleson.

I went to the auction room in question, and I found it entirely empty of everything but echoes and moldiness, with the single exception of Pickleson on a piece of red drugget. This suited my purpose, as I wanted a private and confidential word with him, which was: "Pickleson, owing much happiness to you, I put you in my will for a fypunnote; but, to save trouble, here's fourpunten down, which may equally suit your views, and let us so conclude the transaction." Pickleson, who up to that remark had had the dejected appearance of a long Roman rushlight that couldn't anyhow get lighted, brightened up at his top extremity, and made his acknowledgments in a way which (for him) was parliamentary eloquence. He likewise did add that, having ceased to draw as a Roman, Mim had made proposals for his going in as a conwerted Indian giant worked upon by "The Dairyman's Daughter." This Pickleson, having no acquaintance with the tract named after that young woman, and not being willing to couple gags with his serious views, had declined to do, thereby leading to words and the total stoppage of the unfortunate young man's beer. All of which, during the whole of the interview, was confirmed by the ferocious growling of Mim down below in the pay-place, which shook the giant like a leaf.

But what was to the present point in the remarks of the traveling giant, otherwise Pickleson, was this: "Doctor Marigold"—I give his words without a hope of conweying their feebleness—"who is the strange young man that hangs about your carts?" "The strange young man?" I gives him back, thinking that he meant her, and his languid circulation had dropped a syllable. "Doctor," he returns, with a pathos calculated to draw a tear from even a manly eye, "I am weak, but not so weak yet as that I don't know my words. I repeat them, Doctor. The strange young man." It then appeared that Pickleson, being forced to stretch his legs (not that they wanted it) only at times when he couldn't be seen for nothing, to wit in the dead of the night and toward daybreak, had twice seen hanging about my carts, in that same town of Lancaster where I had been only two nights, this same unknown young man.

It put me rather out of sorts. What it meant as to particulars I no more foreboded then than you forebode now, but it put me rather out of sorts. Howsoever, I made light of it to Pickleson, and I took leave of Pickleson, advising him to spend his legacy in getting up his stamina, and to continue to stand by his religion. Toward morning I kept a lookout for the strange young man, and—what was more—I saw the strange young man. He was well dressed and well looking. He loitered very nigh my carts, watching them like as if he was taking care of them, and soon after daybreak turned and went away. I sent a hail after him, but he never started or looked round, or took the smallest notice.

We left Lancaster within an hour or two, on our way toward Carlisle. Next morning, at daybreak, I looked out again for the strange young man. I did not see him. But next morning I looked out again, and there he was once more I sent another hail after him, but as before he gave not the slightest sign of being anyways disturbed. This put a thought into my head. Acting on it, I watched him in different manners and at different times not necessary to enter into, till I found that this strange young man was deaf and dumb.

The discovery turned me over, because I knew that a part of that establishment where she had been was allotted to young men (some of them well off), and I thought to myself, "If she favors him, where am I? and where is all that I have worked and planned for?" Hoping—I must confess to the selfishness—that she might not favor him, I set myself to find out. At last I was by accident present at a meeting between them in the open air, looking on leaning behind a fir tree without their knowing of it. It was a moving meeting for all the three parties concerned. I knew every syllable that passed between them as well as they did. I listened with my eyes, which had come to be as quick and true with deaf-and-dumb conversation as my ears with the talk of people that can speak. He was a-going out to China as clerk in a merchant's house, which his father had been before him. He was in circumstances to keep a wife, and he wanted her to marry him and go along with him. She persisted, no. He asked if she didn't love him. Yes, she loved him dearly, dearly; but she could never disappoint her beloved, good, noble, generous, and I-don't-know-what-all father (meaning me, the Cheap Jack in the sleeved waistcoat), and she would stay with him, Heaven bless him! though it was to break her heart. Then she cried most bitterly, and that made up my mind.

While my mind had been in an unsettled state about her favoring this young man, I had felt that unreasonable toward Pickleson that it was well for him he had got his legacy down. For I often thought, "If it hadn't been for this same weak-minded giant, I might never have come to trouble my head and wex my soul about the young man." But once that I knew she loved him—once that I had seen her weep for him—it was a different thing. I made it right in my mind with Pickleson on the spot, and I shook myself together to do what was right by all.

She had left the young man by that time (for it took a few minutes to get me thoroughly well shook together), and the young man was leaning against another of the fir trees—of which there was a cluster—with his face upon his arm. I touched him on the back. Looking up and seeing me, he says, in our deaf-and-dumb talk, "Do not be angry."

"I am not angry, good boy, I am your friend. Come with me."

I left him at the foot of the steps of the library cart, and I went up alone. She was drying her eyes.

"You have been crying, my dear."

"Yes, father."

"Why?"

"A headache."

"Not a heartache?"

"I said a headache, father."

"Doctor Marigold must prescribe for that headache."

She took up the book of my prescriptions and held it up with a forced smile, but seeing me keep still and look earnest she softly laid it down again, and her eyes were very attentive.

"The prescription is not there, Sophy."

"Where is it?"

"Here, my dear."

I brought her young husband in, and I put her hand in his, and my only further words to both of them were these: "Doctor Marigold's last prescription. To be taken for life." After which I bolted.

When the wedding come off, I mounted a coat (blue, and bright buttons), for the first and last time in all my days, and I give Sophy away with my own hand. There were only as three and the gentleman who had had charge of her for those two years. I give the wedding dinner of four in the library cart. Pigeon pie, a leg of pickled pork, a pair of fowls, and suitable garden stuff. The best of drinks. I give them a speech, and the gentleman give us a speech, and all our jokes told, and the whole went off like a sky-rocket. In the course of the entertainment I explained to Sophy that I should keep the library cart as my living cart when not upon the road, and that I should keep all her books for her just as they stood, till she come back to claim them. So she went to China with her young husband, and it was a parting sorrowful and heavy, and I got the boy I had another service; and so as of old, when my child and wife were gone, I went plodding along alone, with my whip over my shoulder, at the old horse's head.

Sophy wrote me many letters, and I wrote her many letters. About the end of the first year she sent me one in an unsteady hand: "Dearest father, not a week ago I had a darling little daughter, but I am so well that they let me write these words to you. Dearest and best father, I hope my child may not be deaf and dumb, but I do not yet know." When I wrote back, I hinted the question; but as Sophy never answered that question, I felt it to be a sad one, and I never repeated it. For a long time our letters were regular, but then they got irregular, through Sophy's husband being moved to another station, and through my being always on the move. But we were in one another's thoughts, I was equally sure, letters or no letters.

Five years, odd months, had gone since Sophy went away. I was still the king of the Cheap Jacks, and at a greater height of popularity than ever. I had had a first-rate autumn of it, and on the 23d of December, 1864, I found myself at Uxbridge, Middlesex, clean sold out. So I jogged up to London with the old horse, light and easy, to have my Christmas eve and Christmas Day alone by the fire in the library cart, and then to buy a regular new stock of goods all round, to sell 'em again and get the money.

I am a neat hand at cookery, and I'll tell you what I knocked up for my Christmas-eve dinner in the library cart. I knocked up a beefsteak pudding for one, with two kidneys, a dozen oysters, and a couple of mushrooms thrown in. It's a pudding to put a man in good humor with everything except the two bottom buttons of his waistcoat. Having relished that pudding and cleared away, I turned the lamp low and sat down by the light of the fire, watching it as it shone upon the backs of Sophy's books.

Sophy's books so brought up Sophy's self that I saw her touching face quite plainly, before I dropped off dozing by the fire. This may be a reason why Sophy, with her deaf and dumb child in her arms, seemed to stand silent by me all through my nap. I was on the road, off the road, in all sorts of places, north and south and west and east, winds liked best and winds liked least, here and there and gone astray, over the hills and far away, and still she stood silent by me, with her silent child in her arms. Even when I woke with a start, she seemed to vanish, as if she had stood by me in that very place only a single instant before.

I had started at a real sound and the sound was on the steps of the cart. It was the light, hurried tread of a child, coming clambering up. That tread of a child had once been so familiar to me that for half a moment I believed I was a-going to see a little ghost.

But the touch of a real child was laid upon the outer handle of the door, and the handle turned, and the door opened a little way, and a real child peeped in. A bright little comely girl with large dark eyes.

Looking full at me, the tiny creature took off her mite of a straw hat, and a quantity of dark curls fell all about her face. Then she opened her lips, and said in a pretty voice:

"Grandfather!"

"Ah, my God!" I cries out. "She can speak!"

"Yes, dear grandfather. And I am to ask you whether there was ever any one that I remind you of?"

In a moment Sophy was round my neck, as well as the child, and her husband was a-wringing my hand with his face hid, and we all had to shake ourselves together before we could get over it. And when we did begin to get over it, and I saw the pretty child a-talking, pleased and quick and eager and busy, to her mother, in the signs that I had first taught her mother, the happy and yet pitying tears fell rolling down my face.

TWO GHOST-STORIES.

I.

THE TRIAL FOR MURDER.

I HAVE always noticed a prevalent want of courage, even among persons of superior intelligence and culture, as to imparting their own psychological experiences when those have been of a strange sort. Almost all men are afraid that what they could relate in such wise would find no parallel or response in a listener's internal life, and might be suspected or laughed at. A truthful traveler, who should have seen some extraordinary creature in the likeness of a sea-serpent, would have no fear of mentioning it; but the same traveler, having had some singular presentiment, impulse, vagary of thought, vision (so called), dream, or other remarkable mental impression, would hesitate considerably before he would own to it. To this reticence I attribute much of the obscurity in which such subjects are involved. We do not habitually communicate our experiences of these subjective things as we do our experiences of objective creation. The consequence is that the general stock of experience in this regard appears exceptional, and really is so, in respect of being miserably imperfect.

In what I am going to relate I have no intention of setting up, opposing, or supporting any theory whatever. I know the history of the bookseller of Berlin, I have studied the case of the wife of a late astronomer royal as related by Sir David Brewster, and I have followed the minutest details of a much more remarkable case of spectral illusion occurring within my private circle of friends. It may be necessary to state as to this last that the sufferer (a lady) was in no degree, however distant, related to me. A mistaken assumption on that head might suggest an explanation of a part of my own case—but only a part—which would be wholly without foundation. It cannot be referred to my inheritance of any developed peculiarity, nor had I ever before any at all similar experience, nor have I ever had any at all similar experience since.

It does not signify how many years ago, or how few, a certain murder was committed in England, which attracted great attention. We hear more than enough of murderers as they rise in succession to their atrocious eminence, and I would bury the memory of this particular brute, if I could, as his body was buried, in Newgate Jail. I purposely abstain from giving any direct clew to the criminal's individuality.

When the murder was first discovered, no suspicion fell —or I ought rather to say, for I cannot be too precise in my facts, it was nowhere publicly hinted that any suspicion fell—on the man who was afterward brought to trial. As no reference was at that time made to him in the newspapers, it is obviously impossible that any description of him can at that time have been given in the newspapers. It is essential that this fact be remembered.

Unfolding at breakfast my morning paper containing the account of that first discovery, I found it to be deeply interesting, and I read it with close attention. I read it twice, if not three times. The discovery had been made in a bedroom, and when I laid down the paper I was aware of a flash—rush—flow—I do not know what to call it—no word I can find is satisfactorily descriptive—in which I seemed to see that bedroom passing through my room, like a picture impossibly painted on a running river. Though almost instantaneous in its passing, it was perfectly clear; so clear that I distinctly, and with a sense of relief, observed the absence of the dead body from the bed.

It was in no romantic place that I had this curious sensation, but in chambers in Piccadilly, very near to the corner of St. James' Street. It was entirely new to me. I was in my easy-chair at the moment, and the sensation was accompanied with a peculiar shiver which started the chair from its position. (But it is to be noted that the chair ran easily on castors.) I went to one of the windows (there are two in the room, and the room is on the second floor) to refresh my eyes with the moving objects down in Piccadilly. It was a bright autumn morning, and the street was sparkling and cheerful. The wind was high. As I looked out, it brought down from the park a quantity of fallen leaves, which a gust took and whirled into a spiral pillar. As the pillar fell and the leaves dispersed, I saw two men on the opposite side of the way, going from west to east. They were one behind the other. The foremost man often looked back over his shoulder. The second man followed him, at a distance of some thirty paces, with his right hand menacingly raised. First, the singularity and steadiness of this threatening gesture in so public a thoroughfare attracted my attention; and next, the more remarkable circumstance that nobody heeded it. Both men threaded their way among the other passengers with a smoothness hardly consistent even with the action of walking on a pavement; and no single creature, that I could see, gave them place, touched them, or looked after them. In passing before my windows, they both stared up at me. I saw their two faces very distinctly, and I knew that I could recognize them anywhere. Not that I had consciously noticed anything very remarkable in either face, except that the man who went first had an unusually lowering appearance, and that the face of the man who followed him was of the color of impure wax.

I am a bachelor, and my valet and his wife constitute my whole establishment. My occupation is in a certain branch bank, and I wish that my duties as head of a department were as light as they are popularly supposed to be. They kept me in town that autumn, when I stood in need of change. I was not ill, but I was not well. My reader is to make the most that can be reasonably made of my feeling jaded, having a depressing sense upon me of a monotonous life, and being "slightly dyspeptic." I am assured by my renowned doctor that my real state of health at that time justifies no stronger description, and I quote his own from his written answer to my request for it.

As the circumstances of the murder, gradually unraveling, took stronger and stronger possession of the public mind, I kept them away from mine, by knowing as little about them as was possible in the midst of the universal excitement. But I knew that a verdict of willful murder had been found against the suspected murderer, and that he had been committed to Newgate for trial. I also knew that his trial had been postponed over one sessions of the Central Criminal Court, on the ground of general prejudice and want of time for the preparation of the defense. I may further have known, but I believe I did not, when, or about when, the sessions to which his trial stood postponed would come on.

My sitting-room, bedroom, and dressing-room are all on one floor. With the last there is no communication but through the bedroom. True, there is a door in it, once communicating with the staircase; but a part of the fitting of my bath has been—and had then been for some years—fixed across it. At the same period, and as a part of the same arrangement, the door had been nailed up and canvassed over.

I was standing in my bedroom late one night, giving some directions to my servant before he went to bed. My face was toward the only available door of communication with the dressing-room, and it was closed. My servant's back was toward that door. While I was speaking to him I saw it open and a man look in, who very earnestly and mysteriously beckoned to me. That man was the man who had gone second of the two along Piccadilly, and whose face was of the color of impure wax.

The figure, having beckoned, drew back and closed the door. With no longer pause than was made by my crossing the bedroom, I opened the dressing-room door and looked in. I had a lighted candle already in my hand. I felt no inward expectation of seeing the figure in the dressing-room, and I did not see it there.

Conscious that my servant stood amazed, I turned round to him and said: "Derrick, could you believe that in my cool senses I fancied I saw a——" As I there laid my hand upon his breast, with a sudden start he trembled violently and said, "O Lord, yes, sir! A dead man beckoning!"

Now, I do not believe that this John Derrick, my trusty and attached servant for more than twenty years, had any impression whatever of having seen any such figure until I touched him. The change in him was so startling, when I touched him, that I fully believe he derived his impression in some occult manner from me at that instant.

I bade John Derrick bring some brandy, and I gave him a dram and was glad to take one myself. Of what had preceded that night's phenomenon I told him not a single word. Reflecting on it, I was absolutely certain that I had never seen that face before, except on the one occasion in Piccadilly. Comparing its expression when beckoning at the door with its expression when it had stared up at me as I stood at my window, I came to the conclusion that on the first occasion it had sought to fasten itself upon my memory, and that on the second occasion it had made sure of being immediately remembered.

I was not very comfortable that night, though I felt a certainty, difficult to explain, that the figure would not return. At daylight I fell into a heavy sleep, from which I was awakened by John Derrick's coming to my bedside with a paper in his hand.

This paper, it appeared, had been the subject of an altercation at the door between its bearer and my servant. It was a summons to me to serve upon a jury at the forthcoming sessions of the Central Criminal Court at the Old Bailey. I had never before been summoned on such a jury, as John Derrick well knew. He believed—I am not certain at this hour whether with reason or otherwise—that that class of jurors were customarily chosen on a lower qualification than mine, and he had at first refused to accept the summons. The man who served it had taken the matter very coolly. He had said that my attendance or non-attendance was nothing to him; there the summons was; and I should deal with it at my own peril, and not at his.

For a day or two I was undecided whether to respond to this call or take no notice of it. I was not conscious of the slightest mysterious bias, influence, or attraction, one way or other. Of that I am as strictly sure as of every other statement that I make here. Ultimately I decided, as a break in the monotony of my life, that I would go.

The appointed morning was a raw morning in the month of November. There was a dense brown fog in Piccadilly, and it became positively black and in the last degree oppressive east of Temple Bar. I found the passages and staircases of the court-house flaringly lighted with gas, and the court itself similarly illuminated. I think that until I was conducted by officers into the old court and saw its crowded state, I did not know that the murderer was to be tried that day. I think that until I was so helped into the old court with considerable difficulty, I did not know into which of the two courts sitting my summons would take me. But this must not be received as a positive assertion, for I am not completely satisfied in my mind on either point.

I took my seat in the place appropriated to jurors in waiting, and I looked about the court as well as I could through the cloud of fog and breath that was heavy in it. I noticed the black vapor hanging like a murky curtain outside the great windows, and I noticed the stifled sound of wheels on the straw or tan that was littered in the street; also, the hum of the people gathered there, which a shrill whistle, or a louder song or hail than the rest, occasionally pierced. Soon afterward the judges, two in number, entered and took their seats. The buzz in the court was awfully hushed. The direction was given to put the murderer to the bar. He appeared there. And in that same instant I recognized in him the first of the two men who had gone down Piccadilly.

If my name had been called then, I doubt if I could have answered to it audibly. But it was called about sixth or eighth in the panel, and I was by that time able to say, "Here!" Now, observe. As I stepped into the box, the prisoner, who had been looking on attentively, but with no sign of concern, became violently agitated and beckoned to his attorney. The prisoner's wish to challenge me was so manifest that it occasioned a pause, during which the attorney, with his hand upon the dock, whispered with his client and shook his head. I afterward had it from that gentleman that the prisoner's first affrighted words to him were, "At all hazards, challenge that man!" But that, as he would give no reason for it, and admitted that he had not even known my name until he heard it called and I appeared, it was not done.

Both on the ground already explained, that I wish to avoid reviving the unwholesome memory of that murderer, and also because a detailed account of his long trial is by no means indispensable to my narrative, I shall confine myself closely to such incidents in the ten days and nights during which we, the jury, were kept together as directly bear on my own curious personal experience. It is in that, and not in the murderer, that I seek to interest my reader. It is to that, and not to a page of the Newgate Calendar, that I beg attention.

I was chosen foreman of the jury. On the second morning of the trial, after evidence had been taken for two hours (I heard the church clocks strike), happening to cast my eyes over my brother jurymen, I found an inexplicable difficulty in counting them. I counted them several times, yet always with the same difficulty. In short, I made them one too many.

I touched the brother juryman whose place was next me, and I whispered to him, "Oblige me by counting us." He looked surprised by the request, but turned his head and counted. "Why," says he suddenly, "we are thirt—; but no, it's not possible. No. We are twelve."

According to my counting that day, we were always right in detail, but in the gross we were always one too many. There was no appearance—no figure—to account for it; but I had now an inward foreshadowing of the figure that was surely coming.

The jury were housed at the London Tavern. We all slept in one large room on separate tables, and we were constantly in the charge and under the eye of the officer sworn to hold us in safe-keeping. I see no reason for suppressing the real name of that officer. He was intelligent, highly polite, and obliging, and (I was glad to hear) much respected in the City. He had an agreeable presence, good eyes, enviable black whiskers, and a fine sonorous voice. His name was Mr. Harker.

When we turned into our twelve beds at night, Mr. Harker's bed was drawn across the door. On the night of the second day, not being disposed to lie down, and seeing Mr. Harker sitting on his bed, I went and sat beside him and offered him a pinch of snuff. As Mr. Harker's hand touched mine in taking it from my box a peculiar shiver crossed him, and he said: "Who is this?"

Following Mr. Harker's eyes, and looking along the room, I saw again the figure I expected—the second of the two men who had gone down Piccadilly. I rose and advanced a few steps; then stopped and looked round at Mr. Harker. He was quite unconcerned, laughed, and said in a pleasant way: "I thought for a moment we had a thirteenth juryman, without a bed. But I see it is the moonlight."

Making no revelation to Mr. Harker, but inviting him to take a walk with me to the end of the room, I watched what the figure did. It stood for a few moments by the bedside of each of my eleven brother jurymen, close to the pillow. It always went to the right-hand side of the bed, and always passed out crossing the foot of the next bed. It seemed, from the action of the head, merely to look down pensively at each recumbent figure. It took no notice of me or of my bed, which was that nearest to Mr. Harker's. It seemed to go out where the moonlight came in, through a high window, as by an aërial flight of stairs.

Next morning at breakfast, it appeared that everybody present had dreamed of the murdered man last night, except myself and Mr. Harker.

I now felt as convinced that the second man who had gone down Piccadilly was the murdered man (so to speak) as if it had been borne into my comprehension by his immediate testimony. But even this took place, and in a manner for which I was not at all prepared.

On the fifth day of the trial, when the case for the prosecution was drawing to a close, a miniature of the murdered man, missing from his bedroom upon the discovery of the deed, and afterward found in a hiding-place where the murderer had been seen digging, was put in evidence. Having been identified by the witness under examination, it was handed up to the bench, and thence handed down to be inspected by the jury. As an officer in a black gown was making his way with it across to me, the figure of the second man who had gone down Piccadilly impetuously started from the crowd, caught the miniature from the officer, and gave it to me with its own hands, at the same time saying, in a low and hollow tone—before I saw the miniature, which was in a locket—"I was younger then, and my face was not then drained of blood." It also came between me and the brother juryman to whom I would have given the miniature, and between him and the brother juryman to whom he would have given it, and so passed it on through the whole of our number, and back into my possession. Not one of them, however, detected this.

At table, and generally when we were shut up together in Mr. Harker's custody, we had from the first naturally discussed the day's proceedings a good deal. On that fifth day, the case for the prosecution being closed, and we having that side of the question in a completed shape before us, our discussion was more animated and serious. Among our number was a vestryman—the densest idiot I have ever seen at large—who met the plainest evidence with the most preposterous objections, and who was sided with by two flabby parochial parasites; all the three impaneled from a district so delivered over to fever that they ought to have been upon their own trial for five hundred murders. When these mischievous blockheads were at their loudest, which was toward midnight, while some of us were already preparing for bed, I again saw the murdered man. He stood grimly behind them, beckoning to me. On my going toward them and striking into the conversation, he immediately retired. This was the beginning of a separate series of appearances, confined to that long room in which we were confined. Whenever a knot of my brother jurymen laid their heads together, I saw the head of the murdered man among theirs. Whenever their comparison of notes was going against him, he would solemnly and irresistibly beckon to me.

It will be borne in mind that down to the production of the miniature, on the fifth day of the trial, I had never seen the appearance in court. Three changes occurred now that we entered on the case for the defense. Two of them I will mention together first. The figure was now in court continually, and it never there addressed itself to me, but always to the person who was speaking at the time. For instance. The throat of the murdered man had been cut straight across. In the opening speech for the defense, it was suggested that the deceased might have cut his own throat. At that very moment, the figure, with its throat in the dreadful condition referred to (this it had concealed before), stood at the speaker's elbow, motioning across and across its windpipe, now with the right hand, now with the left, vigorously suggesting to the speaker himself the impossibility of such a wound having been self-inflicted by either hand. For another instance. A witness to character, a woman, deposed to the prisoner's being the most amiable of mankind. The figure at that instant stood on the floor before her, looking her full in the face, and pointing out the prisoner's evil countenance with an extended arm and an outstretched finger.

The third change now to be added impressed me strongly as the most marked and striking of all. I do not theorize upon it; I accurately state it and there leave it. Although the appearance was not itself perceived by those whom it addressed, its coming close to such persons was invariably attended by some trepidation or disturbance on their part. It seemed to me as if it were prevented, by laws to which I was not amenable, from fully revealing itself to others, and yet as if it could invisiby, dumbly, and darkly overshadow their minds. When the leading counsel for the defense suggested that hypothesis of suicide, and the figure stood at the learned gentleman's elbow, frightfully sawing at its severed throat, it is undeniable that the counsel faltered in his speech, lost for a few seconds the thread of his ingenious discourse, wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and turned extremely pale. When the witness to character was confronted by the appearance, her eyes most certainly did follow the direction of its pointed finger and rest in great hesitation and trouble upon the prisoner's face. Two additional illustrations will suffice. On the eighth day of the trial, after the pause which was every day made early in the afternoon for a few minutes' rest and refreshment, I came back into court with the rest of the jury, some little time before the return of the judges. Standing up in the box and looking about me, I thought the figure was not there, until, chancing to raise my eyes to the gallery, I saw it bending forward and leaning over a very decent woman, as if to assure itself whether the judges had resumed their seats or not. Immediately afterward that woman screamed, fainted, and was carried out. So with the venerable, sagacious, and patient judge who conducted the trial. When the case was over and he settled himself and his papers to sum up, the murdered man, entering by the judges' door, advanced to his lordship's desk and looked eagerly over his shoulder at the pages of his notes which he was turning. A change came over his lordship's face; his hand stopped; the peculiar shiver, that I knew so well, passed over him; he faltered, "Excuse me, gentlemen, for a few moments. I am somewhat oppressed by the vitiated air;" and did not recover until he had drunk a glass of water.

Through all the monotony of six of those interminable ten days—the same judges and others on the bench, the same murderer in the dock, the same lawyers at the table, the same tones of question and answer rising to the roof of the court, the same scratching of the judge's pen, the same ushers going in and out, the same lights kindled at the same hour when there had been any natural light of day, the same foggy curtain outside the great windows when it was foggy, the same rain pattering and dripping when it was rainy, the same footmarks of turnkeys and prisoner day after day on the same sawdust, the same keys locking and unlocking the same heavy doors—through all the wearisome monotony which made me feel as if I had been foreman of the jury for a vast period of time and Piccadilly had flourished coevally with Babylon, the murdered man never lost one trace of his distinctness in my eyes, nor was he at any moment less distinct than anybody else. I must not omit, as a matter of fact, that I never once saw the appearance which I call by the name of the murdered man look at the murderer. Again and again I wondered, "Why does he not?" But he never did.

Nor did he look at me, after the production of the miniature, until the last closing minutes of the trial arrived. We retired to consider at seven minutes before ten at night. The idiotic vestryman and his two parochial parasites gave us so much trouble that we twice returned into court, to beg to have certain extracts from the judge's notes reread. Nine of us had not the smallest doubt about those passages, neither, I believe, had any one in court; the dunder-headed triumvirate, however, having no idea but obstruction, disputed them for that very reason. At length we prevailed, and finally the jury returned into court at ten minutes past twelve.

The murdered man at that time stood directly opposite the jury-box, on the other side of the court. As I took my place, his eyes rested on me with great attention; he seemed satisfied, and slowly shook a great gray veil, which he carried on his arm for the first time, over his head and whole form. As I gave in our verdict, "Guilty," the veil collapsed, all was gone, and his place was empty.

The murderer, being asked by the judge, according to usage, whether he had anything to say before sentence of death should be passed upon him, indistinctly muttered something which was described in the leading newspaper of the following day as "a few rambling, incoherent, and half-audible words, in which he was understood to complain that he had not had a fair trial, because the foreman of the jury was prepossessed against him." The remarkable declaration that he really made was this: "My lord, I knew I was a doomed man when the foreman of my jury came into the box. My lord, I knew he would never let me off, because, before I was taken, he somehow got to my bedside in the night, woke me, and put a rope round my neck."

II.

THE SIGNAL-MAN.

"HALLOO! Below there!"

When he heard a voice thus calling to him, he was standing at the door of his box, with a flag in his hand, furled around its short pole. One would have thought, considering the nature of the ground, that he could not have doubted from what quarter the voice came; but, instead of looking up to where I stood on the top of the steep cutting nearly over his head, he turned himself about and looked down the line. There was something remarkable in his manner of doing so, though I could not have said for my life what. But I know it was remarkable enough to attract my notice, even though his figure was foreshortened and shadowed, down in the deep trench, and mine was high above him, so steeped in the glow of an angry sunset that I had shaded my eyes with my hand before I saw him at all.

"Halloo! Below!"

From looking down the line, he turned himself about again, and raising his eyes, saw my figure high above him.

"Is there any path by which I can come down and speak to you?"

He looked up at me without replying, and I looked down at him without pressing him too soon with a repetition of my idle question. Just then there came a vague vibration in the earth and air, quickly changing into a violent pulsation, and an oncoming rush that caused me to start back, as though it had force to draw me down. When such vapor as rose to my height from this rapid train had passed me and was skimming away over the landscape, I looked down again and saw him refurling the flag he had shown while the train went by.

I repeated my inquiry. After a pause, during which he seemed to regard me with fixed attention, he motioned with his rolled-up flag toward a point on my level some two or three hundred yards distant. I called down to him. "All right!" and made for that point. There, by dint ot looking closely about me, I found a rough zigzag descending path notched out, which I followed.

The cutting was extremely deep and unusually precipitate. It was made through a clammy stone that became oozier and wetter as I went down. For these reasons, I found the way long enough to recall a singular air of reluctance or compulsion with which he had pointed out the path.

When I came down low enough upon the zigzag descent to see him again, I saw that he was standing between the rails on the way by which the train had lately passed, in an attitude as if he were waiting for me to appear. He had his left hand at his chin, and that left elbow rested on his right hand, crossed over his breast. His attitude was one of such expectation and watchfulness that I stopped a moment, wondering at it.

I resumed my downward way, and stepping out upon the level of the railroad, and drawing nearer to him, saw that he was a dark, sallow man, with a dark beard and rather heavy eyebrows. His post was in as solitary and dismal a place as ever I saw. On either side a dripping-wet wall of jagged stone, excluding all view but a strip of sky: the perspective one way only a crooked prolongation of this great dungeon; the shorter perspective in the other direction terminating in a gloomy red light, and the gloomier entrance to a black tunnel, in whose massive architecture there was a barbarous, depressing, and forbidding air. So little sunlight ever found its way to this spot that it had an earthy, deadly smell; and so much cold wind rushed through it that it struck chill to me, as if I had left the natural world.

Before he stirred, I was near enough to him to have touched him. Not even then removing his eyes from mine, he stepped back one step and lifted his hand.

This was a lonesome post to occupy (I said), and it had riveted my attention when I looked down from up yonder. A visitor was a rarity, I should suppose; not an unwelcome rarity, I hoped? In me, he merely saw a man who had been shut up within narrow limits all his life, and who, being at last set free, had a newly awakened interest in these great works. To such purpose I spoke to him; but I am far from sure of the terms I used; for, besides that I am not happy in opening any conversation, there was something in the man that daunted me.

He directed a most curious look toward the red light near the tunnel's mouth, and looked all about it, as if something were missing from it, and then looked at me.

That light was part of his charge—was it not?

He answered in a low voice—"Don't you know it is?"

The monstrous thought came into my mind, as I perused the fixed eyes and the saturnine face, that this was a spirit, not a man. I have speculated since whether there may have been infection in his mind.

In my turn I stepped back. But, in making the action, I detected in his eyes some latent fear of me. This put the monstrous thought to flight.

"You look at me," I said, forcing a smile, "as if you had a dread of me."

"I was doubtful," he returned, "whether I had seen you before."

"Where?"

He pointed to the red light he had looked at.

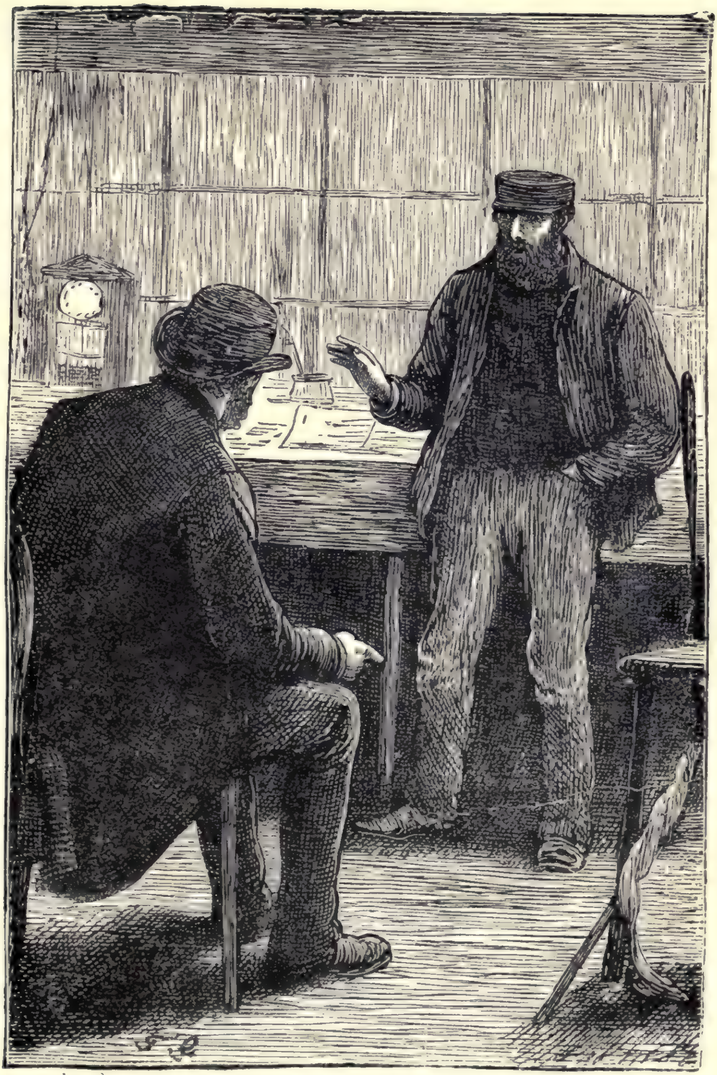
"There?" I said.

Intently watchful of me, he replied (but without sound), "Yes."

"My good fellow, what should I do there? However, be that as it may, I never was there, you may swear."

"I think I may," he rejoined. "Yes. I am sure I may."

His manner cleared, like my own. He replied to my remarks with readiness, and in well-chosen words. Had he much to do there? Yes; that was to say, he had enough responsibility to bear; but exactness and watchfulness were what was required of him, and of actual



C. S.

THE SIGNAL MAN.

work—manual labor—he had next to none. To change that signal, to trim those lights, and to turn this iron handle now and then, was all he had to do under that head. Regarding those many long and lonely hours of which I seemed to make so much, he could only say that the routine of his life had shaped itself into that form, and he had grown used to it. He had taught himself a language down here—if only to know it by sight and to have formed his own crude ideas of its pronunciation could be called learning it. He had also worked at fractions and decimals, and tried a little algebra; but he was, and had been as a boy, a poor hand at figures. Was it necessary for him when on duty always to remain in that channel of damp air, and could he never rise into the sunshine from between those high stone walls? Why, that depended upon times and circumstances. Under some conditions there would be less upon the line than under others, and the same held good as to certain hours of the day and night. In bright weather he did choose occasions for getting a little above these lower shadows; but, being at all times liable to be called by his electric bell, and at such times listening for it with redoubled anxiety, the relief was less than I would suppose.

He took me into his box, where there was a fire, a desk for an official book in which he had to make certain entries, a telegraphic instrument with its dial, face, and needles, and the little bell of which he had spoken. On my trusting that he would excuse the remark that he had been well educated, and (I hoped I might say without offense) perhaps educated above that station, he observed that instances of slight incongruity in such wise would rarely be found wanting among large bodies of men; that he had heard it was so in workhouses, in the police force, even in that last desperate resource, the army; and that he knew it was so, more or less, in any great railway staff. He had been, when young (if I could believe it, sitting in that hut—he scarcely could), a student of natural philosophy and had attended lectures; but he had run wild, misused his opportunities, gone down, and never risen again. He had no complaint to offer about that. He had made his bed, and he lay upon it. It was far too late to make another.

All that I have here condensed he said in a quiet manner, with his grave dark regards divided between me and the fire. He threw in the word "Sir" from time to time, and especially when he referred to his youth—as though to request me to understand that he claimed to be nothing but what I found him. He was several times interrupted by the little bell, and had to read off messages and send replies. Once he had to stand without the door, and display a flag as a train passed and make some verbal communication to the driver. In the discharge of his duties, I observed him to be remarkably exact and vigilant, breaking off his discourse at a syllable and remaining silent until what he had to do was done.

In a word, I should have set this man down as one of the safest of men to be employed in that capacity, but for the circumstances that while he was speaking to me he twice broke off with a fallen color, turned his face toward the little bell when it did not ring, opened the door of the hut (which was kept shut to exclude the unhealthy damp), and looked out toward the red light near the mouth of the tunnel. On both of those occasions he came back to the fire with the inexplicable air upon him which I had remarked, without being able to define, when we were so far asunder.

Said I, when I rose to leave him, "You almost make me think that I have met with a contented man."

(I am afraid I must acknowledge that I said it to lead him on.)

"I believe I used to be so," he rejoined, in the low voice in which he had first spoken; "but I am troubled, sir, I am troubled."

He would have recalled the words if he could. He had said them, however, and I took them up quickly.

"With what? What is your trouble?"

"It is very difficult to impart, sir. It is very, very difficult to speak of. If ever you make me another visit, I will try to tell you."

"But I expressly intend to make you another visit. Say, when shall it be?"

"I go off early in the morning, and I shall be on again at ten to-morrow night, sir."

"I will come at eleven."

He thanked me, and went out at the door with me. "I'll show my white light, sir," he said in his peculiar low voice, "till you have found the way up. When you have found it don't call out! And when you are at the top, don't call out!"

His manner seemed to make the place strike colder to me, but I said no more than "Very well."

"And when you come down to-morrow night, don't call out! Let me ask you a parting question. What made you cry, 'Halloo! Below there!' to-night?"

"Heaven knows," said I. "I cried something to that effect——"

"Not to that effect, sir. Those were the very words. I know them well."

"Admit those were the very words. I said them, no doubt, because I saw you below."

"For no other reason?"

"What other reason could I possibly have?"

"You had no feeling that they were conveyed to you in any supernatural way?"

"No."

He wished me good-night and held up his light. I walked by the side of the down line of rails (with a very disagreeable sensation of a train coming behind me) until I found the path. It was easier to mount than to descend, and I got back to my inn without any adventure.

Punctual to my appointment, I placed my foot on the first notch of the zigzag next night as the distant clocks were striking eleven. He was waiting for me at the bottom, with his white light on. "I have not called out," I said when we came close together; "may I speak now?" "By all means, sir." "Good-night, then, and here's my hand." "Good-night, sir, and here's mine." With that we walked side by side to his box, entered it, closed the door, and sat down by the fire.

"I have made up my mind, sir," he began, bending forward as soon as we were seated, and speaking in a tone but a little above a whisper, "that you shall not have to ask me twice what troubles me. I took you for some one else yesterday evening. That troubles me."

"That mistake?"

"No. That some one else."

"Who is it?"

"I don't know."

"Like me?"

"I don't know. I never saw the face. The left arm is across the face and the right arm is waved—violently waved. This way."

I followed his action with my eyes, and it was the action of an arm gesticulating with the utmost passion and vehemence—"For God's sake clear the way!"

"One moonlight night," said the man, "I was sitting here, when I heard a voice cry, 'Halloo! Below there!' I started up, looked from that door, and saw this some one else standing by the red light near the tunnel, waving as I just now showed you. The voice seemed hoarse with shouting, and it cried, 'Look out! Look out!' And then again, 'Halloo! Below there! Look out!' I caught up my lamp, turned it on red, and ran toward the figure calling, 'What's wrong? What has happened? Where?' It stood just outside the blackness of the tunnel. I advanced so close upon it that I wondered at its keeping the sleeve across its eyes. I ran right up at it, and had my hand stretched out to pull the sleeve away, when it was gone."

"Into the tunnel," said I.

"No. I ran on into the tunnel five hundred yards. I stopped and held my lamp above my head, and saw the figures of the measured distance, and saw the wet stains stealing down the walls and trickling through the arch. I ran out again faster than I had run in (for I had a mortal abhorrence of the place upon me), and I looked all round the red light, with my own red light, and I went up the iron ladder to the gallery atop of it, and I came down again and ran back here. I telegraphed both ways, 'An alarm has been given. Is anything wrong?' The answer came back, both ways, 'All well.'"

Resisting the slow touch of a frozen finger tracing out my spine, I showed him how that this figure must be a deception of his sense of sight; and how that figures, originating in disease of the delicate nerves that minister to the functions of the eye, were known to have often troubled patients, some of whom had become conscious of the nature of their affliction, and had even proved it by experiments upon themselves. "'As to an imaginary cry," said I, "do but listen for a moment to the wind in this unnatural valley while we speak so low, and to the wild harp it makes of the telegraph wires!"

That was all very well, he returned, after we had sat listening for awhile, and he ought to know something of the wind and wires—he who so often passed long winter nights there, alone and watching. But he would beg to remark that he had not finished.

I asked his pardon, and he slowly added these words, touching my arm:

"Within six hours after the appearance the memorable accident on this line happened, and within ten hours the dead and wounded were brought along through the tunnel over the spot where the figure had stood."

A disagreeable shudder crept over me, but I did my best against it. It was not to be denied, I rejoined, that this was a remarkable coincidence, calculated deeply to impress his mind. But it was unquestionable that remarkable coincidences did continually occur, and they must be taken into account in dealing with such a subject. Though to be sure I must admit, I added (for I thought I saw that he was going to bring the objection to bear upon me), men of common sense did not allow much for coincidence in making the ordinary calculations of life.

He again begged to remark that he had not finished.

I again begged his pardon for being betrayed into interruptions.

"This," he said, again laying his hand upon my arm and glancing over his shoulder with hollow eyes, "was just a year ago. Six or seven months passed, and I had recovered from the surprise and shock, when one morning, as the day was breaking, I, standing at that door, looked toward the red light and saw the specter again." He stopped, with a fixed look at me.

"Did it cry out?"

"No. It was silent."

"Did it wave its arm?"

"No. It leaned against the shaft of the light, with both hands before the face. Like this."

Once more I followed his action with my eyes. It was an action of mourning. I have seen such an attitude in stone figures on tombs.

"Did you go up to it?"

"I came in and sat down, partly to collect my thoughts, partly because it had turned me faint. When I went to the door again daylight was above me and the ghost was gone."

"But nothing followed? Nothing came of this?"

He touched me on the arm with his forefinger twice or thrice, giving a ghastly nod each time.

"That very day, as the train came out of the tunnel, I noticed at a carriage window on my side what looked like a confusion of hands and heads, and something waved. I saw it just in time to signal the driver, stop! He shut off and put his brake on, but the train drifted past here a hundred and fifty yards or more. I ran after it, and as I went along heard terrible screams and cries. A beautiful young lady had died instantaneously in one of the compartments, and was brought in here and laid down on this floor between us."

Involuntarily I pushed my chair back, as I looked from the boards at which he pointed to himself.

"True, sir. True. Precisely as it happened, so I tell it you."

I could think of nothing to say to any purpose, and my mouth was very dry. The wind and the wires took up the story with a long lamenting wail.

He resumed. "Now, sir, mark this, and judge how my mind is troubled. The specter came back a week ago. Ever since it has been there, now and again, by fits and starts."

"At the light?"

"At the danger-light."

"What does it seem to do?"

He repeated, if possible with increased passion and vehemence, that former gesticulation of "For God's sake, clear the way!"

Then he went on. "I have no peace or rest for it. It calls to me, for many minutes together, in an agonized manner, 'Below there! Look out! Look out!' It stands waving to me. It rings my little bell——"

I caught at that. "Did it ring your bell yesterday evening when I was here, and you went to the door?"

"Twice."

"Why, see," said I, "how your imagination misleads you. My eyes were on the bell, and my ears were open to the bell, and if I am a living man it did not ring at those times. No, nor at any other time, except when it was rung in the natural course of physical things by the station communicating with you."

He shook his head. "I have never made a mistake as to that yet, sir. I have never confused the specter's ring with the man's. The ghost's ring is a strange vibration in the bell that it derives from nothing else, and I have not asserted that the bell stirs to the eye. I don't wonder that you failed to hear it. But I heard it."

"And did the specter seem to be there when you looked out?"

"It was there."

"Both times"

He repeated firmly: "Both times."

"Will you come to the door with me and look for it now?"

He bit his under lip as though he were somewhat unwilling, but arose. I opened the door and stood on the step, while he stood in the doorway. There was the danger-light. There was the dismal mouth of the tunnel. There were the high, wet stone walls of the cutting. There were the stars above them.

"Do you see it?" I asked him, taking particular note of his face. His eyes were prominent and strained, but not very much more so, perhaps, than my own had been when I had directed them earnestly toward the same spot.

"No," he answered. "It is not there."

"Agreed," said I.

We went in again, shut the door, and resumed our seats. I was thinking how best to improve this advantage, if it might be called one, when he took up the conversation in such a matter-of-course way, so assuming that there could be no serious question of fact between us, that I felt myself placed in the weakest of positions.

"By this time, you will fully understand, sir," he said, "that what troubles me so dreadfully is the question, What does the specter mean?"

I was not sure, I told him, that I did fully understand.

"What is its warning against?" he said, ruminating, with his eyes on the fire, and only by times turning them on me. "What is the danger? Where is the danger? There is danger overhanging somewhere on the line. Some dreadful calamity will happen. It is not to be doubted this third time, after what has gone before. But surely this a cruel haunting of me. What can I do?"

He pulled out his handkerchief and wiped the drops from his heated forehead.

"If I telegraph danger on either side of me or on both, I can give no reason for it," he went on, wiping the palms of his hands. "I should get into trouble and do no good. They would think I was mad. This is the way it would work—Message: 'Danger! Take care!' Answered: 'What danger? Where?' Message: 'Don't know. But for God's sake, take care!' They would displace me. What else could they do?"

His pain of mind was most pitiable to see. It was the mental torture of a conscientious man, oppressed beyond endurance by an unintelligible responsibility involving life.

"When it first stood under the danger-light," he went on, putting his dark hair back from his head and drawing his hands outward across and across his temples in an extremity of feverish distress, "why not tell me where that accident was to happen—if it must happen? Why not tell me how it could be averted—if it could have been averted? When on its second coming it hid its face, why not tell me, instead, 'She is going to die. Let them keep her at home?' If it came, on those two occasions, only to show me that its warnings were true, and so to prepare me for the third, why not warn me plainly now? And I, Lord help me! A mere poor signal-man on this solitary station! Why not go to somebody with credit to be believed and power to act?"

When I saw him in this state, I saw that for the poor man's sake, as well as for the public safety, what I had to do for the time was to compose his mind. Therefore, setting aside all question of reality or unreality between us, I represented to him that whoever thoroughly discharged his duty must do well, and that at least it was his comfort that he understood his duty, though he did not understand these confounding appearances. In this effort I succeeded far better than in the attempt to reason him out of his conviction. He became calm; the occupations incidental to his post as the night advanced began to make larger demands on his attention; and I left him at two in the morning. I had offered to stay through the night, but he would not hear of it.

That I more than once looked back at the red light as

I ascended the pathway; that I did not like the red light, and that I should have slept but poorly if my bed had been under it, I see no reason to conceal. Nor did I like the two sequences of the accident and the dead girl. I see no reason to conceal that, either.

But what ran most in my thoughts was the consideration, how ought I to act, having become the recipient of this disclosure? I had proved the man to be intelligent, vigilant, painstaking, and exact; but how long might he remain so, in his state of mind? Though in a subordinate position, still he held a most important trust, and would I (for instance) like to stake my own life on the chances of his continuing to execute it with precision?

Unable to overcome a feeling that there would be something treacherous in my communicating what he had told me to his superiors in the company, without first being plain with himself and proposing a middle course to him, I ultimately resolved to offer to accompany him (otherwise keeping his secret for the present) to the wisest medical practitioner we could hear of in those parts, and to take his opinion. A change in his time of duty would come round next night, he had apprised me, and he would be off an hour or two after sunrise, and on again soon after sunset. I had appointed to return accordingly.

Next evening was a lovely evening, and I walked out early to enjoy it. The sun was not yet quite down when I traversed the field path near the top of the deep cutting. I would extend my walk for an hour, I said to myself, half an hour on and half an hour back, and it would then be time to go to my signal-man's box.

Before pursuing my stroll, I stepped to the brink and mechanically looked down, from the point from which I had first seen him. I cannot describe the thrill that seized upon me, when, close at the mouth of the tunnel, I saw the appearance of a man, with his left sleeve across his eyes, passionately waving his right arm.

The nameless horror that oppressed me passed in a moment, for in a moment I saw that this appearance of a man was a man indeed, and that there was a little group of other men, standing at a short distance, to whom he seemed to be rehearsing the gesture he made. The danger-light was not yet lighted. Against its shaft a little low hut, entirely new to me, had been made of some wooden supports and tarpaulin. It looked no bigger than a bed.

With an irresistible sense that something was wrong—with a flashing self-reproachful fear that fatal mischief had come of my leaving the man there and causing no one to be sent to overlook or correct what he did—I descended the notched path with all the speed I could make.

"What is the matter?" I asked the men.

"Signal-man killed this morning, sir."

"Not the man belonging to that box?"

"Yes, sir."

"Not the man I know?"

"You will recognize him, sir, if you knew him," said the man who spoke for the others, solemnly uncovering his own head and raising an end of the tarpaulin, "for his face is quite composed."

"Oh, how did this happen—how did this happen?" I asked, turning from one to another as the hut closed in again.

"He was cut down by an engine, sir. No man in England knew his work better, but somehow he was not clear of the outer rail. It was just at broad day. He had struck the light and had the lamp in his hand. As the engine came out of the tunnel his back was toward her, and she cut him down. That man drove her and was showing how it happened. Show the gentleman, Tom."

The man, who wore a rough dark dress, stepped back to his former place at the mouth of the tunnel.

"Coming round the curve in the tunnel, sir," he said, "I saw him at the end, like as if I saw him down a perspective-glass. There was no time to check speed, and I knew him to be very careful. As he didn't seem to take heed of the whistle, I shut it off when we were running down upon him, and called to him as loud as I could call."

"What did you say?"

"I said, 'Below there! Look out! Look out! For God's sake, clear the way!'"

I started.

"Ah! it was a dreadful time, sir. I never left off calling to him. I put this arm before my eyes not to see, and I waved this arm to the last; but it was no use."

Without prolonging the narrative to dwell on any one of its curious circumstances more than any other, I may, in closing it, point out the coincidence that the warning of the engine-driver included not only the words which the unfortunate signal-man had repeated to me as haunting him, but also the words which I myself—not he—had attached, and that only in my own mind, to the gesticulation he had imitated.

THE BOY AT MUGBY.

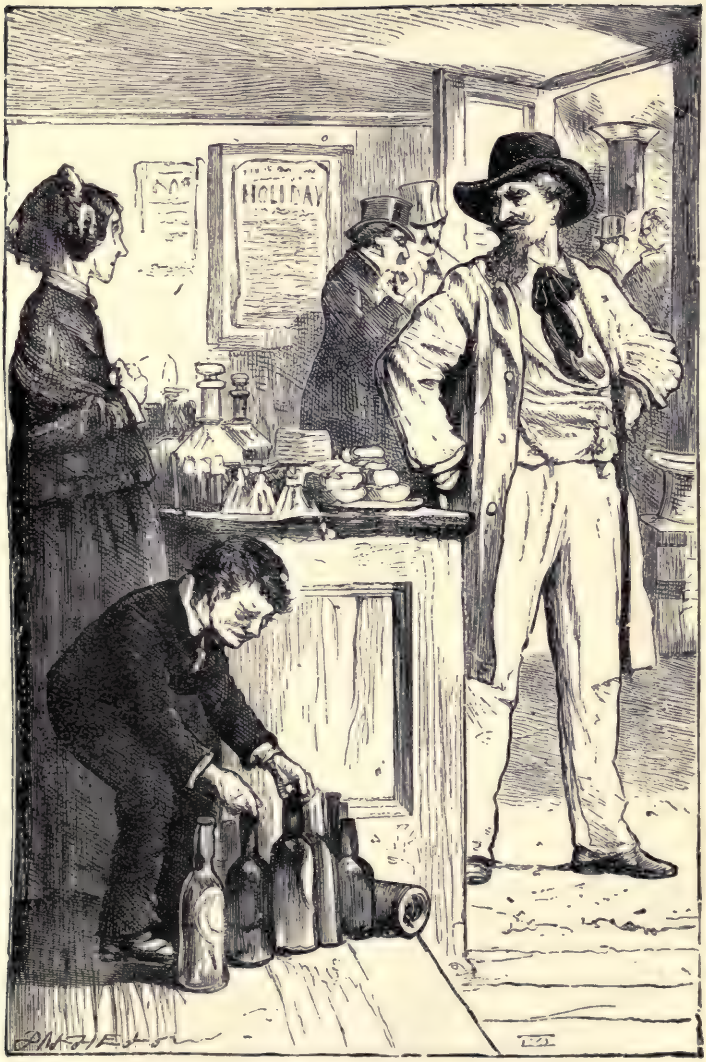
I AM the boy at Mugby. That's about what I am.

You don't know what I mean? What a pity! But I think you do. I think you must. Look here. I am the boy at what is called the refreshment-room at Mugby Junction, and what's proudest boast is that I never yet refreshed a mortal being.

Up in a corner of the down refreshment-room at Mugby Junction, in the height of twenty-seven cross-draughts (I've often counted 'em while they brush the first class hair twenty-seven ways), behind the bottles, among the glasses, bounded on the nor'west by the beer, stood pretty far to the right of a metallic object that's at times the tea-urn and at times the soup-tureen, according to the nature of the last twang imparted to its contents which are the same groundwork, fended off from the traveler by a barrier of stale sponge-cakes erected atop of the counter, and lastly exposed sideways to the glare of our missis' eye—you ask a boy so sitiwated, next time you stop in a hurry at Mugby, for anything to drink; you take particular notice that he'll try to seem not to hear you, that he'll appear in a absent manner to survey the line through a transparent medium composed of your head and body, and that he won't serve you as long as you can possibly bear it. That's me.

What a lark it is! We are the model establishment, we are, at Mugby. Other refreshment-rooms send their imperfect young ladies up to be finished off by our missis. For some of the young ladies, when they're new to the business, come into it mild! Ah! Our missis, she soon takes that out of 'em. Why, I originally come into the business meek myself. But our missis, she soon took that out of me.

What a delightful lark it is! I look upon us refresh-



C.S. THE BOY AT MUGBY.

menters as ockipying the only proudly independent footing on the line. There's Papers, for instance—my honorable friend, if he will allow me to call him so—him as belongs to Smith's book-stall. Why, he no more dares to be up to our refreshmenting games than he dares to jump atop of a locomotive with her steam at full pressure, and cut away upon her alone, driving himself, at limited-mail speed. Papers, he'd get his head punched at every compartment, first, second, and third, the whole length of the train, if he was to venture to imitate my demeanor. It's the same with the porters, the same with the guards, the same with the ticket clerks, the same the whole way up to the secretary, traffic manager, or very chairman. There ain't a one among 'em on the nobly independent footing we are. Did you ever catch one of them, when you wanted anything of him, making a system of surveying the line through a transparent medium of your head and body? I should hope not.

You should see our bandolining-room at Mugby Junction. It's led to by the door behind the counter, which you'll notice usually stands ajar, and it's the room where our missis and our young ladies bandolines their hair. You should see 'em at it, betwixt trains, bandolining away, as if they was anointing themselves for the combat. When you're telegraphed you should see their noses all a-going up with scorn, as if it was a part of the working of the same Cooke and Wheatstone electrical machinery. You should hear our missis give the word. 'Here comes the beast to be fed!" and then you should see 'em indignantly skipping across the line, from the up to the down, or wicer warsaw, and begin to pitch the stale pastry into the plates, and chuck the sawdust sandwiches under the glass covers, and get out the—ha! ha! ha!—the sherry—oh, my eye! my eye!—for your refreshment.

It's only in the isle of the brave and land of the free (by which, of course, I mean to say Britannia) that refreshmenting is so effective, so 'olesome, so constitutional a check upon the public. There was a foreigner, which having politely, with his hat off, beseeched our young ladies and our missis for "a leetel gloss hoff prandee," and having had the line surveyed through him by all, and no other acknowledgment, was a-proceeding at last to help himself, as seems to be the custom in his own country, when our missis, with her hair almost a-coming unbandolined with rage, and her eyes omitting sparks, flew at him, cotched the decanter out of his hand, and said, "Put it down! I won't allow that!" The foreigner turned pale, stepped back with his arms stretched out in front of him, his hands clasped, and his shoulders riz, and exclaimed: "Ah! Is it possible, this! That these disdaineous females and this ferocious old woman are placed here by the administration, not only to empoison the voyagers, but to affront them! Great Heaven! How arrives it? The English people. Or is he then a slave? Or idiot?" Another time, a merry, wide-awake American gent had tried the sawdust and spit it out, and had tried the sherry and spit that out, and had tried in vain to sustain exhausted natur upon butter-scotch, and had been rather extra bandolined and line-surveyed through, when as the bell was ringing and he paid our missis, he says, very loud and good-tempered: "I tell yew what 't is, marm. I la'af. Theer! I la'af. I dew. I oughter ha' seen most things, for I hail from the onlimited side of the Atlantic Ocean, and I haive traveled right slick over the limited, head on through Jeerusalemm and the East and likewise France and Italy, Europe, Old World, and am now upon the track to the chief Europian village, but such an institution as yew and yewer young ladies and yewer fixin's solid and liquid, afore the glorious tarnal I never did see yet! And if I hain't found the eighth wonder of monarchical creation in finding yew and yewer young ladies and yewer fixin's solid and liquid, all as aforesaid, established in a country where the people air not absolute loo-naticks, I am extra double darned with a nip and frizzle to the innermostest grit! Wheerfur—theer!—I la'af! I dew, marm. I la'af!" And so he went, stamping and shaking his sides, along the platform all the way to his own compartment.

I think it was her standing up agin' the foreigner as giv' our missis the idea of going over to France, and droring a comparison betwixt refreshmenting as followed among the frog-eaters and refreshmenting as triumphant in the isle of the brave and land of the free (by which, of course, I mean to say agin Britannia). Our young ladies, Miss Whiff, Miss Piff, and Mrs. Sniff, was unanimous opposed to her going: for, as they says to our missis one and all, it is well beknown to the hends of the herth as no other nation except Britain has a idea of anything, but above all of business. Why then should you tire yourself to prove what is already proved? Our missis, however (being a teaser at all pints), stood out grim obstinate, and got a return pass by Southeastern Tidal, to go right through, if such should be her dispositions, to Marseilles.

Sniff is husband to Mrs. Sniff, and is a regular insignificant cove. He looks arter the sawdust department in a back room, and is sometimes, when we are very hard put to it, let behind the counter with a corkscrew; but never when it can be helped, his demeanor toward the public being disgusting servile. How Mrs. Sniff ever come so far to lower herself as to marry him, I don't know; but I suppose he does, and I should think he wished he didn't, for he leads a awful life. Mrs. Sniff couldn't be much harder with him if he was public. Similarly, Miss Whiff and Miss Piff, taking the tone of Mrs. Sniff, they shoulder Sniff about when he is let in with a corkscrew, and they whisk things out of his hands when in his servility he is a-going to let the public have 'em, and they snap him up when in the crawling baseness of his spirit he is a-going to answer a public question, and they dror more tears into his eyes than ever the mustard does which he all day long lays on to the sawdust. (But it ain't strong.) Once, when Sniff had the repulsiveness to reach across to get the milk-pot to hand over for a baby, I see our missis in her rage catch him by both his shoulders, and spin him out into the bandolining-room.

But Mrs. Sniff—how different! She's the one! She's the one as you'll notice to be always looking another way from you when you look at her. She's the one with the small waist buckled in tight in front, and with the lace cuffs at her wrists, which she puts on the edge of the counter before her, and stands a-smoothing while the public foams. This smoothing the cuffs and looking another way while the public foams is the last accomplishment taught to the young ladies as come to Mugby to be finished by our missis; and it's always taught by Mrs. Sniff.

When our missis went away upon her journey, Mrs. Sniff was left in charge. She did hold the public in check most beautiful! In all my time, I never see half so many cups of tea given without milk to people as wanted it with, nor half so many cups of tea with milk given to people as wanted it without. When foaming ensued, Mrs. Sniff would say: "Then you'd better settle it among yourselves, and change with one another." It was a most highly delicious lark. I enjoyed the refreshmenting business more than ever, and so glad I had took to it when young.

Our missis returned. It got circulated among the young ladies, and it as it might be penetrated to me through the crevices of the bandolining-room, that she had orrors to reveal, if revelations so contemptible could be dignified with the name. Agitation become weakened. Excitement was up in the stirrups. Expectation stood a-tiptoe. At length it was put forth that on our slackest evening in the week, and at our slackest time of that evening betwixt trains, our missis would give her views of foreign refreshmenting in the bandolining-room.

It was arranged tasteful for the purpose. The bandolining table and glass was hid in a corner, a arm-chair was elevated on a packing-case for our missis' ockypation, a table and a tumbler of water (no sherry in it, thankee) was placed beside it. Two of the pupils, the season being autumn and hollyhocks and daliahs being in, ornamented the wall with three devices in those flowers. On one might he read, "May Albion Never Learn;" on a another, "Keep the Public Down;" on another, "Our Refreshmenting Charter." The whole had a beautiful appearance, with which the beauty of the sentiments corresponded.

On our missis' brow was wrote severity as she ascended the fatal platform. (Not that that was anything new.) Miss Whiff and Miss Piff sat at her feet. Three chairs from the waiting-room might have been perceived by a average eye in front of her, on which the pupils was accommodated. Behind them, a very close observer might have discerned a boy. Myself.

"Where," said our missis, glancing gloomily around, "is Sniff?"

"I thought it better," answered Mrs. Sniff, "that he should not be let come in. He is such an ass."

"No doubt," assented our missis. "But for that reason is it not desirable to improve his mind?"

"Oh, nothing will ever improve him," said Mrs. Sniff.

"However," pursued our missis, "call him in, Ezekiel."

I called him in. The appearance of the low-minded cove was hailed with disapprobation from all sides, on account of his having brought his corkscrew with him. He pleaded "the force of habit."

"The force!" said Mrs. Sniff. "Don't let us have you talking about force, for gracious' sake. There! Do stand still where you are, with your back against the wall."

He is a smiling piece of vacancy, and he smiled in the mean way in which he will even smile at the public if he gets a chance (language can say no meaner of him), and he stood upright near the door with the back of his head agin' the wall, as if he was waiting for somebody to come and measure his height for the army.

"I should not enter, ladies," said our missis, "on the revolting disclosures I am about to make, if it was not in the hopes that they will cause you to be yet more implacable in the exercise of the power you wield in a constitutional country, and yet more devoted to the constitutional motto which I see before me"—it was behind her, but the words sounded better so—" 'May Albion Never Learn!'"

Here the pupils as had made the motto admired it, and cried, "Hear! Hear! Hear!" Sniff, showing an inclination to join in chorus, got himself frowned down by every brow.

"The baseness of the French," pursued our missis, "as displayed in the fawning nature of their refreshmenting, equals, if not surpasses, anythink as we ever heard of the baseness of the celebrated Bonaparte."

Miss Whiff, Miss Piff, and me, we drored a heavy breath, equal to saying, "We thought as much!" Miss Whiff and Miss Piff seeming to object to my droring mine along with theirs, I drored another to aggravate 'em.

"Shall I be believed," says our missis, with flashing eyes, "when I tell you that no sooner had I set my foot upon that treacherous shore——"

Here Sniff, either busting out mad, or thinking aloud, says, in a low voice: "Feet. Plural, you know."

The cowering that come upon him when he was spurned by all eyes, added to his being beneath contempt, was sufficient punishment for a cove so groveling. In the midst of a silence rendered more impressive by the turned-up female noses with which it was pervaded, our missis went on:

"Shall I be believed when I tell you that no sooner had I landed," this word with a killing look at Sniff, "on that treacherous shore than I was ushered into a refreshment-room where there were—I do not exaggerate—actually eatable things to eat?"

A groan burst from the ladies. I not only did myself the honor of jining, but also of lengthening it out.

"Where there were," our missis added, "not only eatable things to eat, but also drinkable things to drink?"

A murmur, swelling almost into a scream, ariz. Miss Piff, trembling with indignation, called out, "Name!"

"'I will name," said our missis. "There was roast fowls, hot and cold; there was smoking roast veal surrounded with browned potatoes; there was hot soup with (again I ask shall I be credited?) nothing bitter in it, and no flour to choke off the consumer; there was a variety of cold dishes set off with jelly; there was salad; there was—mark me!—fresh pastry, and that of a light construction; there was a luscious show of fruit; there was bottles and decanters of sound small wine, of every size, and adapted to every pocket; the same odious statement will apply to brandy; and these were set out upon the counter so that all could help themselves."

Our missis' lips so quivered that Mrs. Sniff, though scarcely less convulsed than she were, got up and held the tumbler to them.

"This," proceeds our missis, "was my first unconstitutional experience. Well would it have been if it had been my last and worst. But no. As I proceeded further into that enslaved and ignorant land, its aspect became more hideous. I need not explain to this assembly the ingredients and formation of the British refreshment sangwich?"

Universal laughter—except from Sniff, who, as sangwich-cutter, shook his head in a state of the utmost dejection as he stood with it agin' the wall.

"Well!" said our missis, with dilated nostrils. "Take a fresh, crisp, long, crusty penny loaf made of the whitest and best flour. Cut it longwise through the middle. Insert a fair and nicely fitting slice of ham. Tie a smart piece of ribbon round the middle of the whole to bind it together. Add at one end a neat wrapper of clean white paper by which to hold it. And the universal French refreshment sangwich busts on your disgusted vision."

A cry of "Shame!" from all—except Sniff, who rubbed his stomach with a soothing hand.

"I need not," said our missis, "explain to this assembly the usual formation and fitting of the British refreshment-room?"

No, no, and laughter. Sniff agin shaking his head in low spirits agin' the wall.

"Well," said our missis, "what would you say to a general decoration of everythink, to hangings (sometimes elegant), to easy velvet furniture, to abundance of little tables, to abundance of little seats, to brisk bright waiters, to great convenience, to a pervading cleanliness and tastefulness positively addressing the public, and making the beast thinking itself worth the pains?"

Contemptuous fury on the part of all the ladies. Mrs. Sniff looking as if she wanted somebody to hold her, and everybody else looking as if they'd rather not.

"Three times," said our missis, working herself into a truly terrimenjious state—"three times did I see these shameful things, only between the coast and Paris, and not counting either at Hazebroucke, at Arras, at Amiens. But worse remains. Tell me what would you call a person who should propose in England that there should be kept, say at our own model Mugby Junction, pretty baskets, each holding an assorted cold lunch and dessert for one, each at a certain fixed price, and each within a passenger's power to take away, to empty in the carriage at perfect leisure, and to return at another station fifty or a hundred miles further on?"

There was disagreement what such a person should be called. Whether revolutionist, atheist, Bright (I said him), or un-English. Miss Piff screeched her shirll opinion last in the words: "A malignant maniac!"

"I adopt," says our missis, "the brand set upon such a person by the righteous indignation of my friend Miss Piff. A malignant maniac. Know, then, that that malignant maniac has sprung from the congenial soil of France, and that his malignant madness was in unchecked action on this same part of my journey."

I noticed that Sniff was a-rubbing his hands, and that Mrs. Sniff had got her eye upon him. But I did not take more particular notice, owing to the excited state in which the young ladies was, and to feeling myself called upon to keep it up with a howl.

"On my experience south of Paris," said our missis, in a deep tone, "I will not expatiate. Too loathsome were the task! But fancy this. Fancy a guard coming round, with the train at full speed, to inquire how many for dinner. Fancy his telegraphing forward the numbers of diners. Fancy every one expected, and the table elegantly laid for the complete party. Fancy a charming dinner, in a charming room, and the head cook, concerned for the honor of every dish, superintending in his clean white jacket and cap. Fancy the beast traveling six hundred miles on end, very fast and with great punctuality, yet being taught to expect all this to be done for it!"

A spirited chorus of "The beast!"

I noticed that Sniff was agin a-rubbing his stomach with a soothing hand, and that he had drored up one leg. But agin I didn't take particular notice, looking on myself as called upon to stimulate public feeling. It being a lark besides.

"Putting everything together," said our missis, "French refreshmenting comes to this, and oh, it comes to a nice total! First: eatable things to eat and drinkable things to drink."

A groan from the young ladies, kep' up by me.

"Second: convenience, and even elegance."

Another groan from the young ladies, kep' up by me.

"Third: moderate charges."

This time a groan from me, kep' up by the young ladies.

"Fourth: and here," says our missis, "I claim your angriest sympathy—attention, common civility, nay, even politeness!"

Me and the young ladies regularly raging mad all together.

"And I cannot in conclusion," says our missis, with her spitefullest sneer, "give you a completer pictur of that despicable nation (after what I have related) than assuring you that they wouldn't bear our constitutional ways and noble independence at Mugby Junction for a single month, and that they would turn us to the right-about and put another system in our places as soon as look at us; perhaps sooner, for I do not believe they have the good taste to care to look at us twice."

The swelling tumult was arrested in its rise. Sniff, bore away by his servile disposition, had drored up his leg with a higher and a higher relish, and was now discovered to be waving his corkscrew over his head. It was at this moment that Mrs. Sniff, who had kep' her eye upon him like the fabled obelisk, descended on her victim. Our missis followed them both out, and cries was heard in the sawdust department.

You come into the down refreshment-room at the Junction making believe you don't know me, and I'll pint you out with my right thumb over my shoulder which is our missis, and which is Miss Whiff, and which is Miss Piff, and which is Mrs. Sniff. But you won't get a chance to see Sniff, because he disappeared that night. Whether he perished, tore to pieces, I cannot say; but his corkscrew alone remains to bear witness to the servility of his disposition.

THE SEVEN POOR TRAVELERS.

IN THREE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE OLD CITY OF ROCHESTER.

Strictly speaking, there were only six poor travelers; but being a traveler myself, though an idle one, and being withal as poor as I hope to be, I brought the number up to seven. This word of explanation is due at once, for what says the inscription over the quaint old door?

> Richard Watts, Esq.
> by his Will, dated 22 Aug. 1579,
> founded this Charity
> for Six poor Travelers,
> who not being Rogues, or Proctors,
> May receive gratis for one Night,
> Lodging, Entertainment,
> And Four-pence each.

It was in the ancient little city of Rochester in Kent, of all the good days in the year upon a Christmas eve, that I stood reading this inscription over the quaint old door in question. I had been wandering about the neighboring cathedral, and had seen the tomb of Richard Watts, with the effigy of worthy Master Richard starting out of it like a ship's figure-head; and I had felt that I could do no less, as I gave the verger his fee, than inquire the way to Watts' Charity. The way being very short and very plain, I had come prosperously to the inscription and the quaint old door.

"No," said I to myself as I looked at the knocker, "I know I am not a proctor; I wonder whether I am a rogue!"

Upon the whole, though conscience reproduced two or three pretty faces which might have had smaller attraction for a moral Goliath than they had had for me, who am but a Tom Thumb in that way, I came to the conclusion that I was not a rogue. So, beginning to regard the establishment as in some sort my property, bequeathed to me and divers co-legatees, share and share alike, by the worshipful Master Richard Watts, I stepped backward into the road to survey my inheritance.

I found it to be a clean white house, of a staid and venerable air, with the quaint old door already three times mentioned (an arched door), choice little long, low lattice-windows, and a roof of three gables. The silent High Street of Rochester is full of gables, with old beams and timbers carved into strange faces. It is oddly garnished with a queer old clock that projects over the pavement out of a grave red-brick building, as if Time carried on business there and hung out his sign. Sooth to say, he did an active stroke of work in Rochester in the old days of the Romans, and the Saxons, and the Normans; and down to the times of King John, when the rugged castle—I will not undertake to say how many hundreds of years old then—was abandoned to the centuries of weather which have so defaced the dark apertures in its walls that the ruin looks as if the rooks and daws had picked its eyes out.

I was very well pleased, both with my property and its situation. While I was yet surveying it with growing content, I espied, at one of the upper lattices which stood open, a decent body, of a wholesome matronly appearance, whose eyes I caught inquiringly addressed to mine. They said so plainly, "Do you wish to see the house?" that I answered aloud, "Yes, if you please." And within a minute the old door opened, and I bent my head and went down two steps into the entry.

"This," said the matronly presence, ushering me into a low room on the right, "is where the travelers sit by the fire, and cook what bits of suppers they buy with their fourpences."

"Oh! Then they have no entertainment!" said I. For the inscription over the outer door was still running in my head, and I was mentally repeating, in a kind of tune, "'Lodging, entertainment, and fourpence each."

"They have a fire provided for 'em," returned the matron—a mighty civil person, not, as I could make out, overpaid, "and these cooking-utensils. And this what's painted on a board is the rules for their behavior. They have their fourpences when they get their tickets from the steward over the way—for I don't admit 'em myself, they must get their tickets first—and sometimes one buys a rasher of bacon, and another a herring, and another a pound of potatoes, or what-not. Sometimes two or three of 'em will club their fourpences together and make a supper that way. But not much of anything is to be got for fourpence, at present when provisions is so dear."

"True, indeed," I remarked. I had been looking about the room, admiring its snug fireside at the upper end, its glimpse of the street through the low mullioned window, and its beams overhead. "It is very comfortable," said I.

"Ill-conwenient," observed the matronly presence.

I liked to hear her say so; for it showed a commendable anxiety to execute in no niggardly spirit the intentions of Master Richard Watts. But the room was really so well adapted to its purpose that I protested quite enthusiastically against her disparagement.

"Nay, ma'am," said I, "I am sure it is warm in winter and cool in summer. It has a look of homely welcome and soothing rest. It has a remarkably cozy fireside, the very blink of which, gleaming out into the street upon a winter night, is enough to warm all Rochester's heart. And as to the convenience of the six poor travelers——"

"I don't mean them," returned the presence. "I speak of its being an ill-conwenience to myself and my daughter having no other room to sit in of a night."

This was true enough, but there was another quaint room of corresponding dimensions on the opposite side of the entry: so I stepped across to it, through the open doors of both rooms, and asked what this chamber was for.

"This," returned the presence, "is the board room. Where the gentlemen meet when they come here."

Let me see. I had counted from the street six upper windows besides these on the ground-story. Making a perplexed calculation in my mind, I rejoined, "Then the six poor travelers sleep upstairs?"

My new friend shook her head. "They sleep," she answered, "in two little outer galleries at the back, where their beds has always been ever since the charity was founded. It being so very ill-conwenient to me as things is at present, the gentlemen are going to take off a bit of the back yard, and make a slip of a room for 'em there to sit in before they go to bed."

"And then the six poor travelers," said I, "will be entirely out of the house?"

"Entirely out of the house," assented the presence, comfortably smoothing her hands. "Which is considered much better for all parties and much more conwenient."

I had been a little startled, in the cathedral, by the emphasis with which the effigy of Master Richard Watts was bursting out of his tomb; but I began to think, now, that it might be expected to come across the High Street some stormy night and make a disturbance here.

Howbeit, I kept my thoughts to myself and accompanied the presence to the little galleries at the back. I found them on a tiny scale, like the galleries in old innyards; and they were very clean. While I was looking at them, the matron gave me to understand that the prescribed number of poor travelers were forthcoming every night from year's end to year's end; and that the beds were always occupied. My questions upon this and her replies brought us back to the board room so essential to the dignity of "the gentlemen," where she showed me the printed accounts of the charity hanging up by the window. From them I gathered that the greater part of the property bequeathed by the worshipful Master Richard Watts for the maintenance of this foundation was, at the period of his death, mere marsh-land; but that, in course of time, it had been reclaimed and built upon, and was very considerably increased in value. I found, too, that about a thirtieth part of the annual revenue was now expended on the purposes commemorated in the inscription over the door; the rest being handsomely laid out in chancery, law expenses, collectorship, receivership, poundage, and other appendages of management, highly complimentary to the importance of the six poor travelers. In short, I made the not entirely new discovery that it may be said of an establishment like this, in dear Old England, as of the fat oyster in the American story, that it takes a good many men to swallow it whole.

"And pray, ma'am," said I, sensible that the blankness of my face began to brighten as a thought occurred to me, "could one see these travelers?"

Well! she returned dubiously, no! "Not to-night, for instance?" said I. Well! she returned more positively, no. Nobody ever asked to see them, and nobody ever did see them.

As I am not easily balked in a design when I am set upon it, I urged to the good lady that this was Christmas eve; that Christmas comes but once a year—which is unhappily too true, for when it begins to stay with us the whole year round we shall make this earth a very different place; that I was possessed by the desire to treat the travelers to a supper and a temperate glass of hot wassail; that the voice of Fame had been heard in that land declaring my ability to make hot wassail; that if I were permitted to hold the feast, I should be found conformable to reason, sobriety, good hours; in a word, that I could be merry and wise myself, and had been even known at a pinch to keep others so, although I was decorated with no badge or medal, and was not a brother, orator, apostle, saint, or prophet of any denomination whatever. In the end I prevailed, to my great joy. It was settled that at nine o'clock that night a turkey and a piece of roast beef should smoke upon the board; and that I, faint and unworthy minister for once of Master Richard Watts, should preside as the Christmas-supper host of the six poor travelers.

I went back to my inn to give the necessary directions for the turkey and roast beef, and during the remainder of the day could settle to nothing for thinking of the poor travelers. When the wind blew hard against the windows—it was a cold day, with dark gusts of sleet alternating with periods of wild brightness, as if the year were dying fitfully—I pictured them advancing toward their resting-place along various cold roads, and felt delighted to think how little they foresaw the supper that awaited them. I painted their portraits in my mind and indulged in little heightening touches. I made them footsore; I made them weary; I made them carry packs and bundles; I made them stop by finger-posts and mile-stones, leaning on their bent sticks and looking wistfully at what was written there; I made them lose their way, and filled their five wits with apprehensions of lying out all night and being frozen to death. I took up my hat and went out, climbed to the top of the old castle, and looked over the windy hills that slope down to the Medway, almost believing that I could descry some of my travelers in the distance. After it fell dark and the cathedral bell was heard in the invisible steeple—quite a bower of frosty rhyme when I had last seen it—striking five, six, seven, I became so full of my travelers that I could eat no dinner, and felt constrained to watch them still in the red coals of my fire. They were all arrived by this time, I thought, had got their tickets, and were gone in. There my pleasure was dashed by the reflection that probably some travelers had come too late and were shut out.

After the cathedral bell had struck eight, I could smell a delicious savor of turkey and roast beef rising to the window of my adjoining bedroom, which looked down into the inn yard just where the lights of the kitchen reddened a massive fragment of the castle wall. It was high time to make the wassail now; therefore I had up the materials (which, together with their proportions and combinations, I must decline to impart, as the only secret of my own I was ever known to keep), and made a glorious jorum. Not in a bowl; for a bowl anywhere but on a shelf is a low superstition, fraught with cooling and slopping; but in a brown earthenware pitcher, tenderly suffocated, when full, with a coarse cloth. It being now upon the stroke of nine, I set out for Watts' Charity, carrying my brown beauty in my arms. I would trust Ben, the waiter, with untold gold; but there are strings in the human heart which must never be sounded by another, and drinks that I make myself are those strings in mine.

The travelers were all assembled, the cloth was laid, and Ben had brought a great billet of wood and had laid it artfully on the top of the fire, so that a touch or two of the poker after supper should make a roaring blaze. Having deposited my brown beauty in a red nook of the hearth, inside the fender, where she soon began to sing like an ethereal cricket, diffusing at the same time odors as of ripe vineyards, spice forests, and orange groves—I say, having stationed my beauty in a place of security and improvement, I introduced myself to my guests by shaking hands all round and giving them a hearty welcome.

I found the party to be thus composed. Firstly, myself.

Secondly, a very decent man indeed, with his right arm in a sling, who had a certain clean, agreeable smell of wood about him, from which I judged him to have something to do with shipbuilding. Thirdly, a little sailor-boy, a mere child, with a profusion of rich dark brown hair and deep womanly looking eyes. Fourthly, a shabby-genteel personage in a threadbare black suit, and apparently in very bad circumstances, with a dry, suspicious look; the absent buttons on his waistcoat eked out with red tape; and a bundle of extraordinarily tattered papers sticking out of an inner breast-pocket. Fifthly, a foreigner by birth, but an Englishman in speech, who carried his pipe in the band of his hat, and lost no time in telling me, in an easy, simple, engaging way, that he was a watchmaker from Geneva, and traveled all about the Continent, mostly on foot, working as a journeyman and seeing new countries—possibly (I thought) also smuggling a watch or so now and then. Sixthly, a little widow, who had been very pretty, and was still very young, but whose beauty had been wrecked in some great misfortune, and whose manner was remarkably timid, scared, and solitary. Seventhly and lastly, a traveler of a kind familiar to my boyhood, but now almost obsolete—a book peddler, who had a quantity of pamphlets and numbers with him, and who presently boasted that he could repeat more verses in an evening than he could sell in a twelvemonth.

All these I have mentioned in the order in which they sat at table. I presided, and the matronly presence faced me. We were not long in taking our places, for the supper had arrived with me, in the following procession:

Myself with the pitcher.
Ben with beer.
Inattentive boy with hot plates. | Inattentive boy with hot plates.

THE TURKEY.

Female carrying sauces to be heated on the spot.

THE BEEF.

Man with tray on his head, containing vegetables and sundries.
Volunteer hostler from hotel, grinning and rendering no assistance.

As we passed along the High Street. comet-like, we left a long tail of fragrance behind us, which caused the public to stop, sniffing in wonder. We had previously left at the corner of the inn yard a wall-eyed young man connected with the fly department, and well accustomed to the sound of a railway whistle which Ben always carries in his pocket, whose instructions were, so soon as he should hear the whistle blown, to dash into the kitchen, seize the hot plum-pudding and mince-pies, and speed with them to Watts' Charity, where they would be received (he was further instructed) by the sauce-female, who would be provided with brandy in a blue state of combustion.

All these arrangements were executed in the most exact and punctual manner. I never saw a finer turkey, finer beef, or greater prodigality of sauce and gravy; and my travelers did wonderful justice to everything set before them. It made my heart rejoice to observe how their wind and frost hardened faces softened in the clatter of plates and knives and forks and mellowed in the fire and supper heat. While their hats and caps and wrappers, hanging up, a few small bundles on the ground in a corner, and in another corner three or four old walking-sticks, worn down at the end to mere fringe, linked this snug interior with the bleak outside in a golden chain.

When supper was done and my brown beauty had been elevated on the table, there was a general requisition to me to "take the corner;" which suggested to me comfortably enough how much my friends here made of a fire—for when had I ever thought so highly of the corner since the days when I connected it with Jack Horner? However, as I declined, Ben, whose touch on all convivial instruments is perfect, drew the table apart, and instructing my travelers to open right and left on either side of me and form round the fire, closed up the center with myself and my chair, and preserved the order we had kept at table. He had already, in a tranquil manner, boxed the ears of the inattentive boys until they had been by imperceptible degrees boxed out of the room; and he now rapidly skirmished the sauce-female into the High Street, disappeared, and softly closed the door.

This was the time for bringing the poker to bear on the billet of wood. I tapped it three times, like an enchanted talisman, and a brilliant host of merry-makers burst out of it and sported off by the chimney—rushing up the middle in a fiery country dance and never coming down again. Meanwhile, by their sparkling light, which threw our lamp into the shade, I filled the glasses and gave my travelers, Christmas!—Christmas eve, my friends, when the shepherds, who were poor travelers, too, in their way, heard the angels sing, "On earth, peace. Good-will toward men!"

I don't know who was the first among us to think that we ought to take hands as we sat, in deference to the toast, or whether any one of us anticipated the others, but at any rate we all did it. We then drank to the memory of the good Master Richard Watts. And I wish his ghost may never have had worse usage under that roof than it had from us!

It was the witching time for story-telling. "Our whole life, travelers," said I, "is a story more or less intelligible—generally less; but we shall read it by a clearer light when it is ended. I, for one, am so divided this night between fact and fiction that I scarce know which is which. Shall I beguile the time by telling you a story as we sit here?"

They all answered yes. I had little to tell them, but I was bound by my own proposal. Therefore, after looking for awhile at the spiral column of smoke wreathing up from my brown beauty, through which I could have almost sworn I saw the effigy of Master Richard Watts less startled than usual, I fired away.

THE STORY OF RICHARD DOUBLEDICK.

In the year 1799, a relative of mine came limping down, on foot, to this town of Chatham. I call it this town, because if anybody present knows to a nicety where Rochester ends and Chatham begins, it is more than I do. He was a poor traveler, with not a farthing in his pocket. He sat by the fire in this very room, and he slept one night in a bed that will be occupied to-night by some one here.

My relative came down to Chatham to enlist in a cavalry regiment, if a cavalry regiment would have him; if not, to take King George's shilling from any corporal or sergeant who would put a bunch of ribbons in his hat. His object was to get shot; but he thought he might as well ride to death as be at the trouble of walking.

My relative's Christian name was Richard, but he was better known as Dick. He dropped his own surname on the road down, and took up that of Doubledick. He was passed as Richard Doubledick; age, twenty-two; height, five foot ten; native place, Exmouth, which he had never been near in his life. There was no cavalry in Chatham when he limped over the bridge here with half a shoe to his dusty foot, so he enlisted into a regiment of the line, and was glad to get drunk and forget all about it.

You are to know that this relative of mine had gone wrong and run wild. His heart was in the right place, but it was sealed up. He had been betrothed to a good and beautiful girl, whom he had loved better than she—or perhaps even he—believed; but in an evil hour he had given her cause to say to him solemnly, "Richard, I will never marry any other man. I will live single for your sake, but Mary Marshall's lips"—her name was Mary Marshall—"never address another word to you on earth. Go, Richard! Heaven forgive you!" This finished him. This brought him down to Chatham. This made him Private Richard Doubledick, with a determination to be shot.

There was not a more dissipated and reckless soldier in Chatham barracks, in the year 1799, than Private Richard Doubledick. He associated with the dregs of every regiment; he was as seldom sober as he could be and was constantly under punishment. It became clear to the whole barracks that Private Richard Doubledick would very soon be flogged.

Now, the captain of Richard Doubledick's company, was a young gentleman not above five years his senior, whose eyes had an expression in them which affected Private Richard Doubledick in a very remarkable way. They were bright, handsome, dark eyes—what are called laughing eyes generally, and, when serious, rather steady than severe—but they were the only eyes now left in his narrowed world that Private Richard Doubledick could not stand. Unabashed by evil report and punishment, defiant of everything else and everybody else, he had but to know that those eyes looked at him for a moment, and he felt ashamed. He could not so much as salute Captain

Taunton in the street like any other officer. He was reproached and confused—troubled by the mere possibility of the captain's looking at him. In his worst moments he had rather turn back and go any distance out of his way than encounter those two handsome, dark, bright eyes.

One day, when Private Richard Doubledick came out of the black hole, where he had been passing the last forty-eight hours, and in which retreat he spent a good deal of his time, he was ordered to betake himself to Captain Taunton's quarters. In the stale and squalid state of a man just out of the black hole, he had less fancy than ever for being seen by the captain; but he was not so mad yet as to disobey orders, and consequently went up to the terrace overlooking the parade-ground, where the officers' quarters were, twisting and breaking in his hands, as he went along, a bit of the straw that had formed the decorative furniture of the black hole.

"Come in!" cried the captain when he knocked with his knuckles at the door. Private Richard Doubledick pulled off his cap, took a stride forward, and felt very conscious that he stood in the light of the dark, bright eyes.

There was a silent pause. Private Richard Doubledick had put the straw in his mouth and was gradually doubling it up into his windpipe and choking himself.

"Doubledick," said the captain, "do you know where you are going to?"

"To the devil, sir?" faltered Doubledick.

"Yes," returned the captain. "And very fast."

Private Richard Doubledick turned the straw of the black hole in his mouth, and made a miserable salute of acquiescence.

"Doubledick," said the captain, "since I entered his majesty's service, a boy of seventeen, I have been pained to see many men of promise going that road; but I have never been so pained to see a man determined to make the shameful journey as I have been, ever since you joined the regiment, to see you."

Private Richard Doubledick began to find a film stealing over the floor at which he looked; also to find the legs of the captain's breakfast-table turning crooked, as if he saw them through water.

"I am only a common soldier, sir," said he. "It signifies very little what such a poor brute comes to."

"You are a man," returned the captain with grave indignation, "of education and superior advantages; and if you say that, meaning what you say, you have sunk lower than I had believed. How low that must be, I leave you to consider; knowing what I know of your disgrace, and seeing what I see."

"I hope to get shot soon, sir," said Private Richard Doubledick; "and then the regiment and the world together will be rid of me."

The legs of the table were becoming very crooked. Doubledick, looking up to steady his vision, met the eyes that had so strong an influence over him. He put his hand before his own eyes, and the breast of his digrace-jacket swelled as if it would fly asunder.

"I would rather," said the young captain, "see this in you, Doubledick, than I would see 5,000 guineas counted out upon this table for a gift to my good mother. Have you a mother?"

"I am thankful to say she is dead, sir."

"If your praises," returned the captain, "were sounded from mouth to mouth through the whole regiment, through the whole army, through the whole country, you would wish she had lived to say, with pride and joy, 'He is my son!'"

"Spare me, sir," said Doubledick. "She would never have heard any good of me. She would never have had any pride and joy in owning herself my mother. Love and compassion she might have had, and would have always had, I know; but not— Spare me, sir! I am a broken wretch, quite at your mercy!" And he turned his face to the wall and stretched out his imploring hand.

"My friend——" began the captain.

"God bless you, sir!" sobbed Private Richard Doubledick.

"You are at the crisis of your fate. Hold your course unchanged a little longer, and you know what must happen. I know even better than you can imagine that after that has happened, you are lost. No man who could shed those tears could bear those marks."

"I fully believe it, sir," in a low, shivering voice, said Private Richard Doubledick.

"But a man in any station can do his duty," said the young captain, "and, in doing it, can earn his own respect, even if his case should be so very unfortunate and so very rare that he can earn no other man's. A common soldier, poor brute though you called him just now, has this advantage in the stormy times we live in, that he always does his duty before a host of sympathizing witnesses. Do you doubt that he may so do it as to be extolled through a whole regiment, through a whole army, through a whole country? Turn while you may yet retrieve the past, and try."

"I will! I ask for only one witness, sir," cried Richard, with a bursting heart.

"I understand you. I will be a watchful and faithful one."

I have heard from Private Richard Doubledick's own lips that he dropped down upon his knee, kissed that officer's hand, arose, and went out of the light of the dark, bright eyes an altered man.

In that year, 1799, the French were in Egypt, in Italy, in Germany—where not? Napoleon Bonaparte had likewise begun to stir against us in India, and most men could read the signs of the great troubles that were coming on. In the very next year, when we formed an alliance with Austria against him, Captain Taunton's regiment was on service in India. And there was not a finer non-commissioned officer in it—no, nor in the whole line—than Corporal Richard Doubledick.

In 1801 the Indian army were on the coast of Egypt. Next year was the year of the proclamation of the short peace, and they were recalled. It had then become well known to thousands of men that wherever Captain Taunton, with the dark, bright eyes, led, there, close to him, ever at his side, firm as a rock, true as the sun, and brave as Mars, would be certain to be found, while life beat in their hearts, that famous soldier, Sergeant Richard Doubledick.

Eighteen hundred and five, besides being the great year of Trafalgar, was a year of hard fighting in India. That year saw such wonders done by a sergeant-major who cut his way single-handed through a solid mass of men, recovered the colors of his regiment, which had been seized from the hand of a poor boy shot through the heart, and rescued his wounded captain, who was down, and in a very jungle of horses' hoofs and sabers—saw such wonders done, I say, by this brave sergeant-major, that he was specially made the bearer of the colors he had won; and Ensign Richard Doubledick had risen from the ranks.

Sorely cut up in every battle, but always reënforced by the bravest of men, for the fame of following the old colors, shot through and through, which Ensign Richard Doubledick had saved, inspired all breasts—this regiment fought its way through the Peninsular War up to the investment of Badajos in 1812. Again and again it had been cheered through the British ranks until the tears had sprung into men's eyes at the mere hearing of the mighty British voice so exultant in their valor; and there was not a drummer-boy but knew the legend that wherever the two friends, Major Taunton with the dark, bright eyes, and Ensign Richard Doubledick, who was devoted to him, were seen to go, there the boldest spirits in the English army became wild to follow.

One day, at Badajos—not in the great storming, but in repelling a hot sally of the besieged upon our men at work in the trenches, who had given way—the two officers found themselves hurrying forward, face to face, against a party of French infantry, who made a stand. There was an officer at their head, encouraging his men—a courageous, handsome, gallant officer of thirty-five, whom Doubledick saw hurriedly, almost momentarily, but saw well. He particularly noticed this officer waving his sword and rallying his men with an eager and excited cry, when they fired in obedience to his gesture, and Major Taunton dropped.

It was over in ten minutes more, and Doubledick returned to the spot where he had laid the best friend man ever had on a coat spread upon the wet clay. Major Taunton's uniform was opened at the breast, and on his shirt were three little spots of blood.

"Dear Doubledick," said he, "I am dying."

"For the love of Heaven, no!" exclaimed the other, kneeling down beside him and passing his arm round his neck to raise his head. "Taunton! My preserver, my guardian angel, my witness! Dearest, truest, kindest of human beings! Taunton! For God's sake!"

The bright, dark eyes—so very, very dark now, in the pale face—smiled upon him; and the hand he had kissed thirteen years ago laid itself fondly on his breast.

"Write to my mother. You will see home again. Tell her how we became friends. It will comfort her, as it comforts me."

He spoke no more, but faintly signed for a moment toward his hair as it fluttered in the wind. The ensign understood him. He smiled again when he saw that, and gently turning his face over on the supporting arm as if for rest, died, with his hand upon the breast in which he had revived a soul.

No dry eye looked on Ensign Richard Doubledick that melancholy day. He buried his friend on the field and became a lone, bereaved man. Beyond his duty he appeared to have but two remaining cares in life—one to preserve the little packet of hair he was to give to Taunton's mother; the other to encounter that French officer who had rallied the men under whose fire Taunton fell. A new legend now began to circulate among our troops; and it was that when he and the French officer came face to face once more, there would be weeping in France.

The war went on—and through it went the exact picture of the French officer on one side and the bodily reality on the other—until the battle of Toulouse was fought. In the returns sent home appeared these words: "Severely wounded, but not dangerously, Lieutenant Richard Doubledick."

At midsummer-time in the year 1814, Lieutenant Richard Doubledick, now a browned soldier, thirty-seven years of age, came home to England invalided. He brought the hair with him, near his heart. Many a French officer had he seen since that day; many a dreadful night, in searching with men and lanterns for his wounded, had he relieved French officers lying disabled; but the mental picture and the reality had never come together.

Though he was weak and suffered pain, he lost not an hour in getting down to Frome in Somersetshire, where Taunton's mother lived. In the sweet, compassionate words that naturally present themselves to the mind tonight, "he was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow."

It was a Sunday evening, and the lady sat at her quiet garden window, reading the Bible; reading to herself, in a trembling voice, that very passage in it, as I have heard him tell. He heard the words, "Young man, I say unto thee, arise!"

He had to pass the window; and the bright, dark eyes of his debased time seemed to look at him. Her heart told her who he was; she came to the door quickly and fell upon his neck.

"He saved me from ruin, made me a human creature, won me from infamy and shame. Oh, God forever bless him! As he will, he will!"

"He will!" the lady answered. "I know he is in heaven!" Then she piteously cried, "But oh, my darling boy, my darling boy!"

Never from the hour when Private Richard Doubledick enlisted at Chatham had the private, corporal, sergeant, sergeant-major, ensign, or lieutenant breathed his right name, or the name of Mary Marshall, or a word of the story of his life, into any ear except his reclaimer's. That previous scene in his existence was closed. He had firmly resolved that his expiation should be to live unknown; to disturb no more the peace that had long grown over his old offenses; to let it be revealed, when he was dead, that he had striven and suffered, and had never forgotten; and then, if they could forgive him and believe him—well, it would be time enough—time enough!

But that night, remembering the words he had cherished for two years, "Tell her how we became friends. It will comfort her, as it comforts me," he related everything. It gradually seemed to him as if in his maturity he had recovered a mother; it gradually seemed to her as if in her bereavement she had found a son. During his stay in England, the quiet garden into which he had slowly and painfully crept, a stranger, became the boundary of his home; when he was able to rejoin his regiment in the spring, he left the garden, thinking. Was this indeed the first time he had ever turned his face toward the old colors with a woman's blessing?

He followed them—so ragged, so scarred and pierced now that they would scarcely hold together—to Quatre Bras and Ligny. He stood beside them, in an awful stillness of many men, shadowy through the mist and drizzle of a wet June forenoon, on the field of Waterloo. And down to that hour the picture in his mind of the French officer had never been compared with the reality.

The famous regiment was in action early in the battle, and received its first check in many an eventful year, when he was seen to fall. But it swept on to avenge him, and left behind it no such creature in the world of consciousness as Lieutenant Richard Doubledick.

Through pits of mire and pools of rain; along deep ditches, once roads, that were pounded and plowed to pieces by artillery, heavy wagons, tramp of men and horses, and the struggle of every wheeled thing that could carry wounded soldiers; jolted among the dying and the dead, so disfigured by blood and mud as to be hardly recognizable for humanity; undisturbed by the moaning of men and the shrieking of horses, which, newly taken from the peaceful pursuits of life, could not endure the sight of the stragglers lying by the wayside, never to resume their toilsome journey; dead as to any sentient life that was in it, and yet alive—the form that had been Lieutenant Richard Doubledick, with whose praises England rang, was conveyed to Brussels. There it was tenderly laid down in hospital; and there it lay, week after week, through the long bright summer days, until the harvest, spared by war, had ripened and was gathered in.

Over and over again the sun rose and set upon the crowded city, over and over again the moonlight nights were quiet on the plains of Waterloo: and all that time was a blank to what had been Lieutenant Richard Doubledick. Rejoicing troops marched into Brussels and marched out; brothers and fathers, sisters, mothers, and wives, came thronging thither, drew their lots of joy or agony, and departed; so many times a day the bells rang; so many times the shadows of the great buildings changed; so many lights sprang up at dusk; so many feet passed here and there upon the pavements; so many hours of sleep and cooler air of night succeeded; indifferent to all, a marble face lay on a bed, like the face of a recumbent statue on the tomb of Lieutenant Richard Doubledick.

Slowly laboring, at last, through a long, heavy dream of confused time and place, presenting faint glimpses of army surgeons whom he knew and of faces that had been familiar to his youth—dearest and kindest among them Mary Marshall's, with a solicitude upon it more like reality than anything he could discern—Lieutenant Richard Doubledick came back to life. To the beautiful life of a calm autumn evening sunset, to the peaceful life of a fresh quiet room with a large window standing open; a balcony beyond, in which were moving leaves and sweet-smelling flowers; beyond, again, the clear sky, with the sun full in his sight, pouring its golden radiance on his bed.

It was so tranquil and so lovely that he thought he had passed into another world. And he said in a faint voice: "Taunton, are you near me?"

A face bent over him. Not his, his mother's.

"I came to nurse you. We have nursed you many weeks. You were moved here long ago. Do you remember nothing?"

"Nothing."

The lady kissed his cheek and held his hand, soothing him.

"Where is the regiment? What has happened? Let me call you mother. What has happened, mother?"

"A great victory, dear. The war is over, and the regiment was the bravest in the field."

His eyes kindled, his lips trembled, he sobbed, and the tears ran down his face. He was very weak, too weak to move his hand.

"Was it dark just now?" he asked presently.

"No."

"It was only dark to me? Something passed away, like a black shadow. But as it went and the sun—Oh, the blessed sun, how beautiful it is!—touched my face, I thought I saw a light white cloud pass out at the door. Was there nothing that went out?"

She shook her head, and in a little while he fell asleep, she still holding his hand and soothing him.

From that time he recovered. Slowly, for he had been desperately wounded in the head and had been shot in the body, but making some little advance every day. When he had gained sufficient strength to converse as he lay in bed, he soon began to remark that Mrs. Taunton always brought him back to his own history. Then he recalled his preserver's dying words, and thought, "It comforts her."

One day he awoke out of a sleep, refreshed, and asked her to read to him. But the curtain of the bed, softening the light, which she always drew back when he awoke, that she might see him from her table at the bedside where she sat at work, was held undrawn; and a woman's voice spoke which was not hers.

"Can you bear to see a stranger?" it said softly. "Will you like to see a stranger?"

"Stranger!" he repeated. The voice awoke old memories, before the days of Private Richard Doubledick.

"A stranger now, but not a stranger once," it said in tones that thrilled him. "Richard, dear Richard, lost through so many years, my name——"

He cried out her name, "Mary," and she held him in her arms, and his head lay on her bosom.

"I am not breaking a rash vow, Richard. These are not Mary Marshall's lips that speak. I have another name."

She was married.

"I have another name, Richard. Did you ever hear it?"

"Never!"

He looked into her face, so pensively beautiful, and wondered at the smile upon it through her tears.

"Think again, Richard. Are you sure you never heard my altered name?"

"Never!"

"Don't move your head to look at me, dear Richard. Let it lie here while I tell my story. I loved a generous, noble man; loved him with my whole heart; loved him for years and years; loved him faithfully, devotedly; loved him with no hope of return; loved him, knowing nothing of his highest qualities—not even knowing that he was alive. He was a brave soldier. He was honored and beloved by thousands of thousands, when the mother of his dear friend found me, and showed me that in all his triumphs he had never forgotten me. He was wounded in a great battle. He was brought, dying, here, into Brussels. I came to watch and tend him, as I would have joyfully gone, with such a purpose, to the dreariest ends of the earth. When he knew no one else, he knew me. When he suffered most, he bore his sufferings barely murmuring, content to rest his head where yours rests now. When he lay at the point of death he married me, that he might call me wife before he died. And the name, my dear love, that I took on that forgotten night——"

"I know it now!' he sobbed. "The shadowy remembrance strengthens. It is come back. I thank Heaven that my mind is quite restored! My Mary, kiss me; lull this weary head to rest, or I shall die of gratitude. His parting words are fulfilled. I see home again!"

Well! They were happy. It was a long recovery, but they were happy through it all. The snow had melted on the ground, and the birds were singing in the leafless thickets of the early spring, when those three were first able to ride out together, and when people flocked about the open carriage to cheer and congratulate Captain Richard Doubledick.

But even then it became necessary for the captain, instead of returning to England, to complete his recovery in the climate of Southern France. They found a spot upon the Rhone, within a ride of the old town of Avignon, and within view of its broken bridge, which was all they could desire; they lived there together six months; then returned to England. Mrs. Taunton, growing old after three years—though not so old as that her bright, dark eyes were dimmed—and remembering that her strength had been benefited by the change, resolved to go back for a year to those parts. So she went with a faithful servant, who had often carried her son in his arms; and she was to be rejoined and escorted home, at the year's end, by Captain Richard Doubledick.

She wrote regularly to her children (as she called them now), and they to her. She went to the neighborhood of Aix; and there, in their own chateau near the farmer's house she rented, she grew into intimacy with a family belonging to that part of France. The intimacy began in her often meeting among the vineyards a pretty child, a girl with a most compassionate heart, who was never tired of listening to the solitary English lady's stories of her poor son and the cruel wars. The family were as gentle as the child, and at length she came to know them so well that she accepted their invitation to pass the last month of her residence abroad under their roof. All this intelligence she wrote home, piecemeal as it came about, from time to time; and at last inclosed a polite note from the head of the chateau, soliciting, on the occasion of his approaching mission to that neighborhood, the honor of the company of *cet homme si justement célèbre*, Monsieur le Capitaine Richard Doubledick.

Captain Doubledick, now a hardy, handsome man in the full vigor of life, broader across the chest and shoulders than he had ever been before, dispatched a courteous reply and followed it in person. Traveling through all that extent of country after three years of peace, he blessed the better days on which the world had fallen. The corn was golden, not drenched in unnatural red; was bound in sheaves for food, not trodden underfoot by men in mortal fight. The smoke rose up from peaceful hearths, not blazing ruins. The carts were laden with the fair fruits of the earth, not with wounds and death. To him who had so often seen the terrible reverse, these things were beautiful indeed; and they brought him in a softened spirit to the old chateau near Aix upon a deep blue evening.

It was a large chateau of the genuine old ghostly kind, with round towers, and extinguishers, and a high leaden roof, and more windows than Aladdin's palace. The lattice blinds were all thrown open, after the heat of the day, and there were glimpses of rambling walls and corridors within. Then there were immense out-buildings fallen into partial decay, masses of dark trees, terrace gardens, balustrades; tanks of water, too weak to play and too dirty to work; statues, weeds, and thickets of iron railing that seemed to have overgrown themselves like the shrubberies, and to have branched out in all manner of wild shapes. The entrance doors stood open, as doors often do in that country when the heat of the day is past; and the captain saw no bell or knocker, and walked in.

He walked into a lofty stone hall, refreshingly cool and gloomy after the glare of a southern day's travel. Extending along the four sides of this hall was a gallery, leading to suits of rooms; and it was lighted from the top. Still no bell was to be seen.

"Faith," said the captain, halting, ashamed of the clanking of his boots, "this is a ghostly beginning!" He started back and felt his face turn white. In the gallery, looking down at him, stood the French officer—the officer whose picture he had carried in his mind so long and so far. Compared with the original at last—in every lineament how like it was!

He moved and disappeared, and Captain Richard Doubledick heard his steps coming quickly down into the hall. He entered through an archway. There was a bright, sudden look upon his face, much such a look as it had worn in that fatal moment.

Monsieur le Capitaine Richard Doubledick? Enchanted to receive him! A thousand apologies! The servants were all out in the air. There was a little *fête* among them in the garden. In effect, it was the *fête* day of my daughter, the little cherished and protected of Madame Taunton.

He was so gracious and so frank that Monsieur le Capitaine Richard Doubledick could not withhold his hand. "It is the hand of a brave Englishman," said the French officer, retaining it while he spoke. "I could respect a brave Englishman, even as my foe, how much more as my friend! I also am a soldier."

"He has not remembered me as I have remembered him; he did not take such note of my face that day as I took of his," thought Captain Richard Doubledick. "How shall I tell him?"

The French officer conducted his guest into a garden and presented him to his wife, an engaging and beautiful woman, sitting with Mrs. Taunton in a whimsical old-fashioned pavilion. His daughter, her fair young face beaming with joy, came running to embrace him; and there was a boy baby to tumble down among the orange-trees on the broad steps in making for his father's legs. A multitude of children visitors were dancing to sprightly music; and all the servants and peasants about the chateau were dancing too. It was a scene of innocent happiness that might have been invented for the climax of the scenes of peace which had soothed the captain's journey.

He looked on greatly troubled in his mind, until a resounding bell rang, and the French officer begged to show him his rooms. They went upstairs into the gallery from which the officer had looked down, and Monsieur le Capitaine Richard Doubledick was cordially welcomed to a grand outer chamber, and a smaller one within, all clocks, and draperies, and hearths, and brazen dogs, and tiles, and cool devices, and elegance, and vastness.

"You were at Waterloo," said the French officer.

"I was," said Captain Richard Doubledick. "And at Badajos."

Left alone with the sound of his own stern voice in his ears, he sat down to consider, What shall I do, and how shall I tell him? At that time, unhappily, many deplorable duels had been fought between English and French officers, arising out of the recent war; and these duels and how to avoid this officer's hospitality were the uppermost thought in Captain Richard Doubledick's mind.

He was thinking, and letting the time run out in which he should have dressed for dinner, when Mrs. Taunton spoke to him outside the door, asking if he could give her the letter he had brought from Mary. "His mother, above all," the captain thought. "How shall I tell her?"

"You will form a friendship with your host, I hope," said Mrs. Taunton, whom he hurriedly admitted, "that will last for life. He is so true-hearted and so generous, Richard, that you can hardly fail to esteem one another. If he had been spared," she kissed (not without tears) the locket in which she wore his hair, "he would have appreciated him with his own magnanimity, and would have been truly happy that the evil days were past which made such a man his enemy."

She left the room; and the captain walked, first to one window, whence he could see the dancing in the garden, then to another window, whence he could see the smiling prospect and the peaceful vineyard.

"Spirit of my departed friend," said he, "is it through thee these better thoughts are rising in my mind? Is it thou who hast shown me, all the way I have been drawn to meet this man, the blessings of the altered time? Is it thou who hast sent thy stricken mother to me to stay my angry hand? Is it from thee the whisper comes that this man did his duty as thou didst—and as I did, through thy guidance, which has wholly saved me here on earth—and that he did no more?"

He sat down, with his head buried in his hands, and, when he rose up, made the second strong resolution of his life—that neither to the French officer, nor to the mother of his departed friend, nor to any soul, while either of the two was living, would he breathe what only he knew. And when he touched that French officer's glass with his own that day at dinner, he secretly forgave him in the name of the Divine Forgiver of injuries.

Here I ended my story as the first poor traveler. But if I had told it now, I could have added that the time has since come when the son of Major Richard Doubledick and the son of that French officer, friends as their fathers were before them, fought side by side in one cause, with their respective nations, like long-divided brothers whom the better times have brought together, fast united.

CHAPTER III.

THE ROAD.

My story being finished, and the wassail too, we broke up as the cathedral bell struck twelve. I did not take leave of my travelers that night; for it had come into my head to reappear, in conjunction with some hot coffee, at seven in the morning.

As I passed along the High Street I heard the waits at a distance, and struck off to find them. They were playing near one of the old gates of the city, at the corner of a wonderfully quaint row of red-brick tenements, which the clarionet obligingly informed me were inhabited by the minor canons. They had odd little porches over the doors, like sounding-boards over old pulpits; and I thought I should like to see one of the minor canons come out upon his top step and favor us with a little Christmas discourse about the poor scholars of Rochester; taking for his text the words of his Master relative to the devouring of widows' houses.

The clarionet was so communicative, and my inclinations were (as they generally are) of so vagabond a tendency, that I accompanied the waits across an open green called the Vines, and assisted—in the French sense—at the performance of two waltzes, two polkas, and three Irish melodies, before I thought of my inn any more. However, I returned to it then, and found a fiddle in the kitchen, and Ben, the wall-eyed young man, and two chambermaids, circling round the great deal table with the utmost animation.

I had a very bad night. It cannot have been owing to the turkey or the beef—and the wassail is out of the question—but in every endeavor that I made to get to sleep I failed most dismally. I was never asleep; and in whatsoever unreasonable direction my mind rambled, the effigy of Master Richard Watts perpetually embarrassed it.

In a word, I only got out of the worshipful Master Richard Watts way by getting out of bed in the dark at six o'clock, and tumbling, as my custom is, into all the cold water that could be accumulated for the purpose. The outer air was dull and cold enough in the street when I came down there; and the one candle in our supper-room at Watts' Charity looked as pale in the burning as if it had had a bad night too. But my travelers had all slept soundly, and they took to the hot coffee and the piles of bread-and-butter, which Ben had arranged like deals in a timber-yard, as kindly as I could desire.

While it was yet scarcely daylight, we all came out into the street together, and there shook hands. The widow took the little sailor toward Chatham, where he was to find a steamboat for Sheerness; the lawyer, with an extremely knowing look, went his own way without committing himself by announcing his intentions; two more struck off by the cathedral and old castle for Maidstone; and the book peddler accompanied me over the bridge. As for me I was going to walk by Cobham Woods as far upon my way to London as I fancied.

When I came to the stile and footpath by which I was to diverge from the main road I bade farewell to my last remaining poor traveler and pursued my way alone. And now the mists began to rise in the most beautiful manner and the sun to shine; and as I went on through the bracing air, seeing the hoar-frost sparkle everywhere, I felt as if all nature shared in the joy of the great birthday.

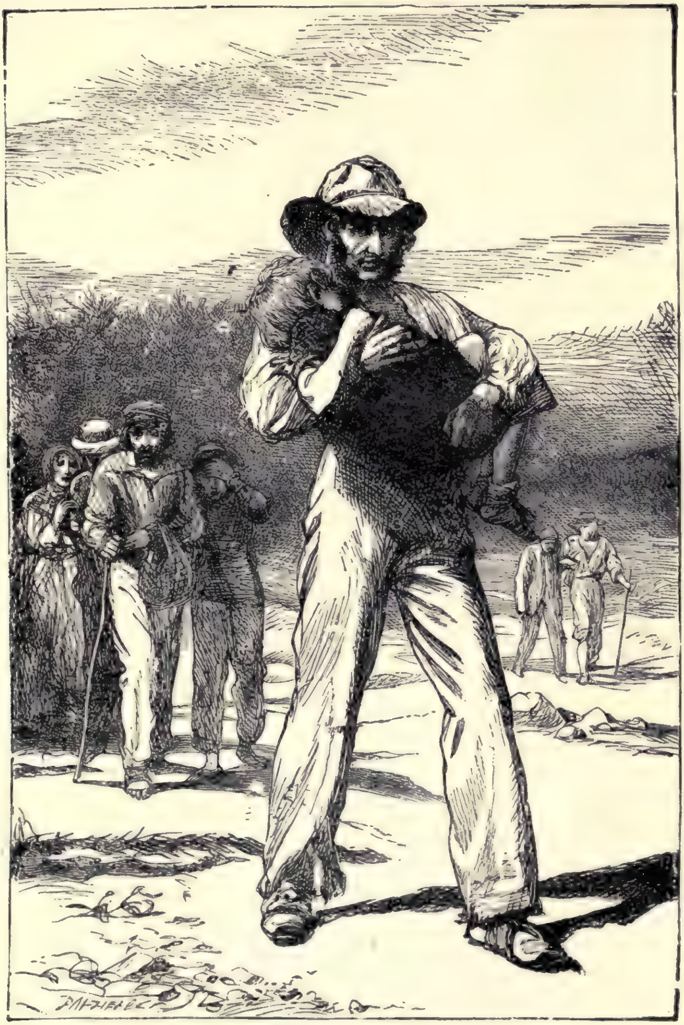
Going through the woods, the softness of my tread upon the mossy ground and among the brown leaves enhanced the Christmas sacredness by which I felt surrounded. As the whitened stems environed me, I thought how the Founder of the time had never raised his benignant hand save to bless and heal except in the case of one unconscious tree. By Cobham Hall I came to the village and the churchyard where the dead had been quietly buried "in the sure and certain hope" which Christmas time inspired. What children could I see at play and not be loving of, recalling who had loved them! No garden that I passed was out of unison with the day, for I remembered that the tomb was in a garden, and that "she, supposing him to be the gardener," had said, "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him and I will take him away." In time the distant river with the ships came full in view, and with it pictures of the poor fishermen, mending their nets, who arose and followed him—of the teaching of the people from a ship pushed off a little way from shore by reason of the multitude—of a majestic figure walking on the water in the loneliness of night. My very shadow on the ground was eloquent of Christmas; for did not the people lay their sick where the mere shadow of the men who had heard and seen him might fall as they passed along?

Thus Christmas begirt me far and near until I had come to Blackheath and had walked down the long vista of gnarled old trees in Greenwich Park, and was being steam-rattled through the mists now closing in once more toward the lights of London. Brightly they shone, but not so brightly as my own fire and the brighter faces around it when we came together to celebrate the day. And there I told of worthy Master Richard Watts and of my supper with the six poor travelers who were neither rogues nor proctors, and from that hour to this I have never seen one of them again.

REPRINTED PIECES.

THE LONG VOYAGE.

When the wind is blowing and the sleet or rain is driving against the dark windows, I love to sit by the fire, thinking of what I have read in books of voyage and travel. Such books have had a strong fascination for my mind from my earliest childhood; and I wonder it should have come to pass that I never have been round the world, never have been shipwrecked, ice-environed, tomahawked, or eaten. Sitting on my ruddy hearth in the twilight of New Year's eve, I find incidents of travel rise around me from all the latitudes and longitudes of the globe. They observe no order or sequence, but appear and vanish as they will—"come like shadows, so depart." Columbus, alone upon the sea with his disaffected crew, looks over the waste of waters from his high station on the poop of his ship, and sees the first uncertain glimmer of the light, "rising and falling with the waves, like a torch in the bark of some fisherman," which is the shining star of a new world. Bruce is caged in Abyssinia, surrounded by the gory horrors which shall often startle him out of his sleep at home when years have passed away. Franklin, come to the end of his unhappy overland journey—would that it had been his last!—lies perishing of hunger with his brave companions: each emaciated figure stretched upon its miserable bed without the power to rise: all dividing the weary days between their prayers, their remembrances of the dear ones at home, and conversation on the pleasures of eating; the last-named topic being ever present to them, likewise, in their dreams. All the African travelers, way-worn, solitary, and sad, submit themselves again to drunken, murderous, man-selling despots of the lowest order of humanity; and Mungo Park, fainting under a tree and succored by a woman, grate-



C.S. THE LONG VOYAGE.

fully remembers how his Good Samaritan has always come to him in woman's shape the wide world over.

A shadow on the wall in which my mind's eye can discern some traces of a rocky sea-coast recalls to me a fearful story of travel derived from that unpromising narrator of such stories, a parliamentary blue-book. A convict is its chief figure, and this man escapes with other prisoners from a penal settlement. It is an island, and they seize a boat and get to the mainland. Their way is by a rugged and precipitous sea-shore, and they have no earthly hope of ultimate escape, for the party of soldiers dispatched by an easier course to cut them off must inevitably arrive at their distant bourne long before them, and retake them if by any hazard they survive the horrors of the way. Famine, as they all must have foreseen, besets them early in their course. Some of the party die and are eaten; some are murdered by the rest and eaten. This one awful creature eats his fill, and sustains his strength and lives on to be recaptured and taken back. The unrelateable experiences through which he has passed have been so tremendous that he is not hanged as he might be, but goes back to his old chain-gang work. A little time, and he tempts one other prisoner away, seizes another boat, and flies once more—necessarily in the old hopeless direction, for he can take no other. He is soon cut off and met by the pursuing party face to face upon the beach. He is alone. In his former journey he acquired an inappeasable relish for his dreadful food. He urged the new man away expressly to kill him and eat him. In the pockets on one side of his coarse convict-dress are portions of the man's body, on which he is regaling; in the pockets on the other side is an untouched store of salted pork (stolen before he left the island) for which he has no appetite. He is taken back and he is hanged. But I shall never see that sea-beach on the wall or in the fire, without him, solitary monster, eating as he prowls along, while the sea rages and rises at him.

Captain Bligh (a worse man to be intrusted with arbitrary power there could scarcely be) is handed over the side of the Bounty and turned adrift on the wide ocean in an open boat, by order of Fletcher Christian, one of his officers, at this very minute. Another flash of my fire, and "Thursday October Christian," twenty-five years of age, son of the dead-and-gone Fletcher by a savage mother, leaps aboard his majesty's ship Briton, hove-to off Pitcairn's Island; says his simple grace before eating, in good English; and knows that a pretty little animal on board is called a dog, because in his childhood he had heard of such strange creatures from his father and the other mutineers, grown gray under the shade of the bread-fruit trees, speaking of their lost country far away.

See the Haleswell, East Indiaman outward bound, driving madly on a January night toward the rocks near Seacombe, on the island of Purbeck! The captain's two dear daughters are aboard, and five other ladies. The ship has been driving many hours, has seven feet water in her hold, and her mainmast has been cut away. The description of her loss, familiar to me from my early boyhood, seems to be read aloud as she rushes to her destiny.

"About two in the morning of Friday, January 6, the ship still driving and approaching very fast to the shore, Mr. Henry Meriton, the second mate, went again into the cuddy, where the captain then was. Another conversation taking place, Captain Pierce expressed extreme anxiety for the preservation of his beloved daughters, and earnestly asked the officer if he could devise any method of saving them. On his answering with great concern that he feared it would be impossible, but that their only chance would be to wait for morning, the captain lifted up his hands in silent and distressful ejaculation.

"At this dreadful moment the ship struck, with such violence as to dash the heads of those standing in the cuddy against the deck above them, and the shock was accompanied by a shriek of horror that burst at one instant from every quarter of the ship.

"Many of the seamen, who had been remarkably inattentive and remiss in their duty during great part of the storm, now poured upon deck, where no exertions of the officers could keep them while their assistance might have been useful. They had actually skulked in their hammocks, leaving the working of the pumps and other necessary labors to the officers of the ship and the soldiers, who had made uncommon exertions. Roused by a sense of their danger, the same seamen at this moment, in frantic exclamation, demanded of Heaven and their fellowsufferers that succor which their own efforts, timely made, might possibly have procured.

"The ship continued to beat on the rocks; and soon bilging, fell with her broadside toward the shore. When she struck, a number of the men climbed up the ensign-staff, under an apprehension of her immediately going to pieces.

"Mr. Meriton, at this crisis, offered to these unhappy beings the best advice which could be given; he recommended that all should come to the side of the ship lying lowest on the rocks, and singly to take the opportunities which might then offer of escaping to the shore.

"Having thus provided, to the utmost of his power, for the safety of the desponding crew, he returned to the round-house, where, by this time, all the passengers and most of the officers had assembled. The latter were employed in offering consolation to the unfortunate ladies, and with unparalleled magnanimity suffering their compassion for the fair and amiable companions of their misfortunes to prevail over the sense of their own danger.

"In this charitable work of comfort Mr. Meriton now joined, by assurances of his opinion that the ship would hold together till the morning, when all would be safe. Captain Pierce, observing one of the young gentlemen loud in his exclamations of terror and frequently cry that the ship was parting, cheerfully bade him be quiet, remarking that though the ship should go to pieces, he would not, but would be safe enough.

"It is difficult to convey a correct idea of the scene of this deplorable catastrophe without describing the place where it happened. The Haleswell struck on the rocks at a part of the shore where the cliff is of vast height and rises almost perpendicular from its base. But at this particular spot the foot of the cliff is excavated into a cavern of ten or twelve yards in depth, and of breadth equal to the length of a large ship. The sides of the cavern are so nearly upright as to be of extremely difficult access; and the bottom is strewed with sharp and uneven rocks, which seem, by some convulsion of the earth, to have been detached from its roof.

"The ship lay with her broadside opposite to the mouth of this cavern, with her whole length stretched from side to side of it. But when she struck, it was too dark for the unfortunate persons on board to discover the real magnitude of the danger and the extreme horror of such a situation.

"In addition to the company already in the round-house, they had admitted three black women and two soldiers wives; who, with the husband of one of them, had been allowed to come in, though the seamen, who had tumultuously demanded entrance to get the lights, had been opposed and kept out by Mr. Rogers and Mr. Brimer, the third and fifth mates. The numbers there were, therefore, now increased to near fifty. Captain Pierce sat on a chair, a cot, or some other movable, with a daughter on each side, whom he alternately pressed to his affectionate breast. The rest of the melancholy assembly were seated on the deck, which was strewed with musical instruments and the wreck of furniture and other articles.

"Here also Mr. Meriton, after having cut several wax-candles in pieces and stuck them up in various parts of the round-house, and lighted up all the glass lanterns he could find, took his seat, intending to wait the approach of dawn; and then assist the partners of his dangers to escape. But observing that the poor ladies appeared parched and exhausted, he brought a basket of oranges and prevailed on some of them to refresh themselves by sucking a little of the juice. At this time they were all tolerably composed, except Miss Mansel, who was in hysteric fits on the floor of the deck of the round-house.

"But on Mr. Meriton's return to the company, he perceived a considerable alteration in the appearance of the ship; the sides were visibly giving way; the deck seemed to be lifting, and he discovered other strong indications that she could not hold much longer together. On this account he attempted to go forward to look out, but immediately saw that the ship had separated in the middle, and that the fore part having changed its position, lay rather further out toward the sea. In such an emergency, when the next moment might plunge him into eternity, he determined to seize the present opportunity and follow the example of the crew and the soldiers, who were now quitting the ship in numbers and making their way to the shore, though quite ignorant of its nature and description.

"Among other expedients, the ensign-staff had been unshipped and attempted to be laid between the ship's side and some of the rocks, but without success, for it snapped asunder before it reached them. However, by the light of a lantern which a seaman handed through the skylight of the round-house to the deck, Mr. Meriton discovered a spar which appeared to be laid from the ship's side to the rocks, and on this spar he resolved to attempt his escape.

"Accordingly, lying down upon it, he thrust himself forward; however, he soon found that it had no communication with the rock; he reached the end of it, and then slipped off, receiving a very violent bruise in his fall, and before he could recover his legs, he was washed off by the surge. He now supported himself by swimming until a returning wave dashed him against the back part of the cavern. Here he laid hold of a small projection in the rock, but was so much benumbed that he was on the point of quitting it, when a seaman who had already gained a footing extended his hand and assisted him until he could secure himself a little on the rock; from which he clambered on a shelf still higher and out of the reach of the surf.

"Mr. Rogers, the third mate, remained with the captain and the unfortunate ladies and their companions nearly twenty minutes after Mr. Meriton had quitted the ship. Soon after the latter left the round-house, the captain asked what was become of him, to which Mr. Rogers replied that he was gone on deck to see what could be done. After this a heavy sea breaking over the ship, the ladies exclaimed, 'Oh, poor Meriton! he is drowned; had he stayed with us he would have been safe!' and they all, particularly Miss Mary Pierce, expressed great concern at the apprehension of his loss.

"The sea was now breaking in at the fore part of the ship, and reached as far as the mainmast. Captain Pierce gave Mr. Rogers a nod, and they took a lamp and went together into the stern gallery, where, after viewing the rocks for some time, Captain Pierce asked Mr. Rogers if he thought there was any possibility of saving the girls; to which he replied he feared there was none, for they could only discover the black face of the perpendicular rock, and not the cavern which afforded shelter to those who escaped. They then returned to the round-house, where Mr. Rogers hung up the lamp and Captain Pierce sat down between his two daughters.

"The sea continuing to break in very fast, Mr. Macmanus, a midshipman, and Mr. Schutz, a passenger, asked Mr. Rogers what they could do to escape. 'Follow me,' he replied, and they all went into the stern gallery, and from thence to the upper quarter gallery on the poop. While there, a very heavy sea fell on board and the round-house gave way; Mr. Rogers heard the ladies shriek at intervals, as if the water reached them; the noise of the sea at other times drowning their voices.

"Mr. Brimer had followed him to the poop, where they remained together about five minutes, when on the breaking of this heavy sea they jointly seized a hen-coop. The same wave which proved fatal to some of those below carried him and his companion to the rock, on which they were violently dashed and miserably bruised.

"Here on the rock were twenty-seven men; but it now being low water, and as they were convinced that on the flowing of the tide all must be washed off, many attempted to get to the back or the sides of the cavern, beyond the reach of the returning sea. Scarcely more than six, besides Mr. Rogers and Mr. Brimer, succeeded.

"Mr. Rogers, on gaining this station, was so nearly exhausted that had his exertions been protracted only a few minutes longer he must have sunk under them. He was now prevented from joining Mr. Meriton by at least twenty men between them, none of whom could move without the imminent peril of his life.

"They found that a very considerable number of the crew, seamen and soldiers, and some petty officers, were in the same situation as themselves, though many who had reached the rocks below perished in attempting to ascend. They could yet discern some part of the ship, and in their dreary station solaced themselves with the hopes of its remaining entire until daybreak; for in the midst of their own distress, the sufferings of the females on board affected them with the most poignant anguish; and every sea that broke inspired them with terror for their safety.

"But, alas! their apprehensions were too soon realized! Within a very few minutes of the time that Mr. Rogers gained the rock, a universal shriek, which long vibrated in their ears, in which the voice of female distress was lamentably distinguished, announced the dreadful catastrophe. In a few moments all was hushed, except the roaring of the winds and the dashing of the waves; the wreck was buried in the deep, and not an atom of it was ever afterward seen."

The most beautiful and affecting incident I know, associated with a shipwreck, succeeds this dismal story for a winter night. The Grosvenor, East Indiaman, homeward bound, goes ashore on the coast of Caffraria. It is resolved that the officers, passengers, and crew, in number one hundred and thirty-five souls, shall endeavor to penetrate on foot, across trackless deserts, infested by wild beasts and cruel savages, to the Dutch settlements at the Cape of Good Hope. With this forlorn object before them, they finally separate into two parties—never more to meet on earth.

There is a solitary child among the passengers—a little boy of seven years old who has no relation there; and when the first party is moving away he cries after some member of it who has been kind to him. The crying of a child might be supposed to be a little thing to men in such great extremity; but it touches them, and he is immediately taken into that detachment.

From which time forth this child is sublimely made a sacred charge. He is pushed, on a little raft, across broad rivers by the swimming sailors; they carry him by turns through the deep sand and long grass (he patiently walking at all other times); they share with him such putrid fish as they find to eat; they lie down and wait for him when the rough carpenter, who becomes his especial friend, lags behind. Beset by lions and tigers, by savages, by thirst, by hunger, by death in a crowd of ghastly shapes, they never—O Father of all mankind, thy name be blessed for it!—forget this child. The captain stops exhausted, and his faithful coxswain goes back and is seen to sit down by his side, and neither of the two shall be any more beheld until the great last day; but as the rest go on for their lives, they take the child with them. The carpenter dies of poisonous berries eaten in starvation; and the steward, succeeding to the command of the party, succeeds to the sacred guardianship of the child.

God knows all he does for the poor baby; how he cheerfully carries him in his arms when he himself is weak and ill; how he feeds him when he himself is griped with want; how he folds his ragged jacket round him, lays his little worn face with a woman's tenderness upon his sunburnt breast, soothes him in his sufferings, sings to him as he limps along, unmindful of his own parched and bleeding feet. Divided for a few days from the rest, they dig a grave in the sand and bury their good friend the cooper—those two companions alone in the wilderness—and then the time comes when they both are ill, and beg their wretched partners in despair, reduced and few in number now, to wait by them one day. They wait by them one day, they wait by them two days. On the morning of the third, they move very softly about in making their preparations for the resumption of their journey; for the child is sleeping by the fire, and it is agreed with one consent that he shall not be disturbed until the last moment. The moment comes, the fire is dying—and the child is dead.

His faithful friend, the steward, lingers but a little while behind him. His grief is great, he staggers on for a few days, lies down in the desert, and dies. But he shall be reunited in his immortal spirit—who can doubt it!—with the child, where he and the poor carpenter shall be raised up with the words, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto Me."

As I recall the dispersal and disappearance of nearly all the participators in this once famous shipwreck (a mere handful being recovered at last), and the legends that were long afterward revived from time to time among the English officers at the Cape of a white woman with an infant, said to have been seen weeping outside a savage hut far in the interior, who was whisperingly associated with the remembrance of the missing ladies saved from the wrecked vessel, and who was often sought but never found, thoughts of another kind of travel came into my mind.

Thoughts of a voyager unexpectedly summoned from home, who traveled a vast distance and could never return. Thoughts of this unhappy wayfarer in the depths of his sorrow, in the bitterness of his anguish, in the helplessness of his self-reproach, in the desperation of his desire to set right what he had left wrong and do what he had left undone.

For there were many, many things he had neglected. Little matters while he was at home and surrounded by them, but things of mighty moment when he was at an immeasurable distance. There were many, many blessings that he had inadequately felt, there were many trivial injuries that he had not forgiven, there was love that he had but poorly returned, there was friendship that he had too lightly prized: there were a million kind words that he might have spoken, a million kind looks that he might have given, unaccountable slight easy deeds in which he might have been most truly great and good. O for a day (he would exclaim), for but one day to make amends! But the sun never shone upon that happy day, and out of his remote captivity he never came.

Why does this traveler's fate obscure, on New Year's eve, the other histories of travelers with which my mind was filled but now, and cast a solemn shadow over me? Must I one day make his journey? Even so. Who shall say that I may not then be tortured by such late regrets: that I may not then look from my exile on my empty place and undone work? I stand upon a seashore, where the waves are years. They break and fall, and I may little heed them; but with every wave the sea is rising, and I know that it will float me on this traveler's voyage at last.

THE BEGGING-LETTER WRITER.

THE amount of money he annually diverts from wholesome and useful purposes in the United Kingdom would be a set-off against the window tax. He is one of the most shameless frauds and impositions of this time. In his idleness, his mendacity, and the immeasurable harm he does to the deserving—dirtying the stream of true benevolence, and muddling the brains of foolish justices, with inability to distinguish between the base coin of distress and the true currency we have always among us—he is more worthy of Norfolk Island than three-fourths of the worst characters who are sent there. Under any rational system, he would have been sent there long ago.

I, the writer of this paper, have been, for some time, a chosen receiver of begging letters. For fourteen years, my house has been made as regular a receiving house for such communications as any one of the great branch post-offices is for general correspondence. I ought to know something of the begging-letter writer. He has besieged my doors at all hours of the day and night; he has fought my servant; he has lain in ambush for me, going out and coming in; he has followed me out of town into the country; he has appeared at provincial hotels where I have been staying for only a few hours; he has written to me from immense distances when I have been out of England. He has fallen sick; he has died and been buried; he has come to life again, and again departed from this transitory scene: he has been his own son, his own mother, his own baby, his idiot brother, his uncle, his aunt, his aged grandfather. He has wanted a great-coat to go to India in; a pound to set him up in life forever; a pair of boots to take him to the coast of China: a hat to get him into a permanent situation under government. He has frequently been exactly seven-and-sixpence short of independence. He has had such openings at Liverpool—posts of great trust and confidence in merchants' houses, which nothing but seven-and-sixpence was wanting to him to secure—that I wonder he is not mayor of that flourishing town at the present moment.

The natural phenomena of which he has been the victim are of a most astounding nature. He has had two children who have never grown up; who have never had anything to cover them at night; who have been continually driving him mad by asking in vain for food; who have never come out of fevers and measles (which, I suppose, has accounted for his fuming his letters with tobacco smoke as a disinfectant); who have never changed in the least degree through fourteen long revolving years As to his wife, what that suffering woman has undergone nobody knows. She has always been in an interesting situation through the same long period, and has never been confined yet. His devotion to her has been unceasing. He has never cared for himself; he could have perished—he would rather, in short—but was it not his Christian duty as a man, a husband, and a father to write begging letters when he looked at her? (He has usually remarked that he would call in the evening for an answer to this question.)

He has been the sport of the strangest misfortunes. What his brother has done to him would have broken anybody else's heart. His brother went into business with him and ran away with the money; his brother got him to be security for an immense sum and left him to pay it; his brother would have given him employment to the tune of hundreds a year if he would have consented to write letters on a Sunday; his brother enunciated principles incompatible with his religious views, and he could not (in consequence) permit his brother to provide for him. His landlord has never shown a spark of human feeling. When he put in that execution I don't know, but he has never taken it out. The broker's man has grown gray in possession. They will have to bury him some day.

He has been attached to every conceivable pursuit. He has been in the army, in the navy, in the church, in the law; connected with the press, the fine arts, public institutions, every description and grade of business. He has been brought up as a gentleman; he has been at every college in Oxford and Cambridge; he can quote Latin in his letters (but generally misspells some minor English word); he can tell you what Shakespeare says about begging better than you know it. It is to be observed that in the midst of his afflictions he always reads the newspapers; and rounds off his appeal with some allusion, that may be supposed to be in my way, to the popular subject of the hour.

His life presents a series of inconsistencies. Sometimes he has never written such a letter before. He blushes with shame. That is the first time; that shall be the last. Don't answer it, and let it be understood that then he will kill himself quietly. Sometimes (and more frequently) he has written a few such letters. Then he incloses the answers, with an intimation that they are of inestimable value to him, and a request that they may be carefully returned. He is fond of inclosing something—verses, letters, pawnbrokers' duplicates, anything to necessitate an answer. He is very severe upon "the pampered minion of fortune" who refused him the half-sovereign referred to in the inclosure number two—but he knows me better.

He writes in a variety of styles; sometimes in low spirits; sometimes quite jocosely. When he is in low spirits he writes down-hill and repeats words—these little indications being expressive of the perturbation of his mind. When he is more vivacious he is frank with me; he is quite the agreeable rattle. I know what human nature is—who better? Well! He had a little money once, and he ran through it—as many men have done before him. He finds his old friends turn away from him now—many men have done that before him too! Shall he tell me why he writes to me? Because he has no kind of claim upon me. He puts it on that ground plainly; and begs to ask for the loan (as I know human nature) of two sovereigns, to be repaid next Tuesday six weeks, before twelve at noon.

Sometimes, when he is sure that I have found him out and that there is no chance of money, he writes to inform me that I have got rid of him at last. He has enlisted into the company's service and is off directly—but he wants a cheese. He is informed by the sergeant that it is essential to his prospects in the regiment that he should take out a single Gloucester cheese, weighing from twelve to fifteen pounds. Eight or nine shillings would buy it. He does not ask for money, after what has passed; but if he calls at nine to-morrow morning may he hope to find a cheese? And is there anything he can do to show his gratitude in Bengal?

Once he wrote me rather a special letter, proposing relief in kind. He had got into a little trouble by leaving parcels of mud done up in brown paper at people's houses, on pretense of being a railway porter, in which character he received carriage money. This sportive fancy he expiated in the house of correction. Not long after his release, and on a Sunday morning, he called with a letter (having first dusted himself all over), in which he gave me to understand that, being resolved to earn an honest livelihood, he had been traveling about the country with a cart of crockery. That he had been doing pretty well until the day before, when his horse had dropped down dead near Chatham, in Kent. That this had reduced him to the unpleasant necessity of getting into the shafts himself and drawing the cart of crockery to London—a somewhat exhausting pull of thirty miles. That he did not venture to ask again for money; but that if I would have the goodness to leave him out a donkey, he would call for the animal before breakfast!

At another time my friend (I am describing actual experiences) introduced himself as a literary gentleman in the last extremity of distress. He had had a play accepted at a certain theater—which was really open; its representation was delayed by the indisposition of a leading actor—who was really ill; and he and his were in a state of absolute starvation. If he made his necessities known to the manager of the theater, he put it to me to say what kind of treatment he might expect. Well! we got over that difficulty to our mutual satisfaction. A little while afterward he was in some other strait. I think Mrs. Southcote, his wife, was in extremity—and we adjusted that point too. A little while afterward he had taken a new house, and was going headlong to ruin for want of a water-butt. I had my misgivings about the water-butt, and did not reply to that epistle. But a little while afterward I had reason to feel penitent for my neglect. He wrote me a few broken-hearted lines, informing me that the dear partner of his sorrows died in his arms last night at nine o'clock!

I dispatched a trusty messenger to comfort the bereaved mourner and his poor children; but the messenger went so soon that the play was not ready to be played out; my friend was not at home, and his wife was in a most delightful state of health. He was taken up by the Mendicity Society (informally it afterward appeared), and I presented myself at a London police-office with my testimony against him. The magistrate was wonderfully struck by his educational acquirements, deeply impressed by the excellence of his letters, exceedingly sorry to see a man of his attainments there, complimented him highly on his powers of composition, and was quite charmed to have the agreeable duty of discharging him. A collection was made for the "'poor fellow," as he was called in the reports, and I left the court with a comfortable sense of being universally regarded as a sort of monster. Next day comes to me a friend of mine, the governor of a large prison. "Why did you ever go to the police-office against that man," says he, "without coming to me first? I know all about him and his frauds. He lodged in the house of one of my wardens at the very time when he first wrote to you; and then he was eating spring lamb at eighteen pence a pound, and early asparagus at I don't know how much a bundle!" On that very same day, and in the very same hour, my injured gentleman wrote a solemn address to me, demanding to know what compensation I proposed to make him for his having passed the night in a "loathsome dungeon." And next morning an Irish gentleman, a member of the same fraternity, who had read the case and was very well persuaded I should be chary of going to that police-office again, positively refused to leave my door for less than a sovereign, and resolved to besiege me into compliance, literally "sat down" before it for ten mortal hours. The garrison being well provisioned, I remained within the walls; and he raised the siege at midnight with a prodigious alarm on the bell.

The begging-letter writer often has an extensive circle of acquaintance. Whole pages of the "Court Guide" are ready to be references for him. Noblemen and gentlemen write to say there never was such a man for probity and virtue. They have known him time out of mind, and there is nothing they wouldn't do for him. Somehow, they don't give him that one pound ten he stands in need of; but perhaps it is not enough—they want to do more, and his modesty will not allow it. It is to be remarked of his trade that it is a very fascinating one. He never leaves it; and those who are near to him become smitten with a love of it, too, and sooner or later set up for themselves. He employs a messenger—man, woman, or child. That messenger is certain ultimately to become an independent begging-letter writer. His sons and daughters succeed to his calling, and write begging letters when he is no more. He throws off the infection of begging-letter writing like the contagion of disease. What Sydney Smith so happily called "the dangerous luxury of dishonesty" is more tempting and more catching, it would seem, in this instance than in any other.

He always belongs to a corresponding society of begging-letter writers. Any one who will, may ascertain this fact. Give money to-day in recognition of a begging letter—no matter how unlike a common begging letter—and for the next fortnight you will have a rush of such communications. Steadily refuse to give, and the begging letters become angels' visits, until the society is from some cause or other in a dull way of business, and may as well try you as anybody else. It is of little use inquiring into the begging-letter writer's circumstances. He may be sometimes accidentally found out, as in the case already mentioned (though that was not the first inquiry made); but apparent misery is always a part of his trade, and real misery very often is, in the intervals of spring-lamb and early asparagus. It is naturally an incident of his dissipated and dishonest life.

That the calling is a successful one, and that large sums of money are gained by it, must be evident to anybody who reads the police reports of such cases. But prosecutions are of rare occurrence, relatively to the extent to which the trade is carried on. The cause of this is to be found (as no one knows better than the begging-letter writer, for it is a part of his speculation) in the aversion people feel to exhibit themselves as having been imposed upon, or as having weakly gratified their consciences with a lazy, flimsy substitute for the noblest of all virtues. There is a man at large at the moment when this paper is preparing for the press (on the 29th of April, 1850), and never once taken up yet, who, within these twelve months, has been probably the most audacious and the most successful swindler that even this trade has ever known. There has been something singularly base in this fellow's proceedings; it has been his business to write to all sorts and conditions of people, in the name of persons of high reputation and unblemished honor, professing to be in distress—the general admiration and respect for whom has insured a ready and generous reply.

Now, in the hope that the results of the real experience of a real person may do something more to induce reflection on this subject than any abstract treatise—and with a personal knowledge of the extent to which the begging-letter trade has been carried on for some time and has been for some time constantly increasing—the writer of this paper entreats the attention of his readers to a few concluding words. His experience is a type of the experience of many; some on a smaller, some on an infinitely larger scale. All may judge of the soundness or unsoundness of his conclusions from it.

Long doubtful of the efficacy of such assistance in any case whatever, and able to recall but one, within his whole individual knowledge, in which he had the least after-reason to suppose that any good was done by it, he was led, last autumn, into some serious considerations. The begging letters flying about by every post made it perfectly manifest that a set of lazy vagabonds were interposed between the general desire to do something to relieve the sickness and misery under which the poor were suffering and the suffering poor themselves. That many who sought to do some little to repair the social wrongs, inflicted in the way of preventible sickness and death upon the poor, were strengthening those wrongs, however innocently, by wasting money on pestilent knaves cumbering society. That imagination—soberly following one of these knaves into his life of punishment in jail, and comparing it with the life of one of these poor in a cholera-stricken alley, or one of the children of one of these poor, soothed in its dying hour by the late lamented Mr. Drouet—contemplated a grim farce, impossible to be presented very much longer before God or man. That the crowning miracle of all the miracles summed up in the New Testament, after the miracle of the blind seeing, and the lame walking, and the restoration of the dead to life, was the miracle that the poor had the Gospel preached to them. That while the poor were unnaturally and unnecessarily cut off by the thousand, in the prematurity of their age or in the rottenness of their youth—for of flower or blossom such youth has none—the Gospel was not preached to them, saving in hollow and unmeaning voices. That of all wrongs, this was the first mighty wrong the pestilence warned us to set right. And that no post-office order to any amount, given to a begging-letter writer for the quieting of an uneasy breast, would be presentable on the last great day as anything toward it.

The poor never write these letters. Nothing could be more unlike their habits. The writers are public robbers; and we who support them are parties to their depredations. They trade upon every circumstance within their knowledge that affects us, public or private, joyful or sorrowful; they pervert the lessons of our lives; they change what ought to be our strength and virtue into weakness and encouragement of vice. There is a plain remedy, and it is in our own hands. We must resolve, at any sacrifice of feeling, to be deaf to such appeals and crush the ade.

There are degrees in murder. Life must be held sacred among us in more ways than one—sacred not merely from the murderous weapon, or the subtle poison, or the cruel blow, but sacred from preventible diseases, distortions, and pains. That is the first great end we have to set against this miserable imposition. Physical life respected, moral life comes next. What will not content a begging-letter writer for a week would educate a score of children for a year. Let us give all we can; let us give more than ever. Let us do all we can; let us do more than ever. But let us give and do with a high purpose; not to endow the scum of the earth, to its own greater corruption, with the offals of our duty.

A CHILD'S DREAM OF A STAR.

There was once a child, and he strolled about a good deal and thought of a number of things. He had a sister, who was a child too and his constant companion. These two used to wonder all day long. They wondered at the beauty of the flowers; they wondered at the height and blueness of the sky; they wondered at the depth of the bright water; they wondered at the goodness and the power of God who made the lovely world.

They used to say to one another sometimes: Supposing all the children upon earth were to die, would the flowers, and the water, and the sky be sorry? They believed they would be sorry. For, said they, the buds are the children of the flowers, and the little playful streams that gambol down the hillsides are the children of the water; and the smallest bright specks playing at hide-and-seek in the sky all night must surely be the children of the stars; and they would all be grieved to see their playmates, the children of men, no more.

There was one clear-shining star that used to come out in the sky before the rest, near the church spire, above the graves. It was larger and beautiful, they thought, than all the others, and every night they watched for it, standing hand in hand at a window. Whoever saw it first cried out, "I see the star!" And often they cried out both together, knowing so well when it would rise and where. So they grew to be such friends with it that, before lying down in their beds, they always looked out once again, to bid it good-night; and when they were turning round to sleep they used to say, "God bless the star!"

But while she was still very young, oh, very, very young, the sister drooped, and came to be so very weak that she could no longer stand in the window at night; and then the child looked sadly out by himself, and when he saw the star, turned round and said to the patient pale face on the bed, "I see the star!" and then a smile would come upon the face, and a little weak voice used to say, "God bless my brother and the star!"

And so the time came all too soon when the child looked out alone and when there was no face on the bed; and when there was a little grave among the graves, not there before; and when the star made long rays down toward him as he saw it through his tears.

Now, these rays were so bright, and they seemed to make such a shining way from earth to heaven, that when the child went to his solitary bed he dreamed about the star; and dreamed that, lying where he was, he saw a train of people taken up that sparkling road by angels. And the star, opening, showed him a great world of light, where many more such angels waited to receive them.

All these angels, who were waiting, turned their beaming eyes upon the people who were carried up into the star; and some came out from the long rows in which they stood, and fell upon the people's necks, and kissed them tenderly, and went away with them down avenues of light, and were so happy in their company that lying in his bed he wept for joy.

But there were many angels who did not go with them, and among them one he knew. The patient face that once had lain upon the bed was glorified and radiant, but his heart found out his sister among all the host.

His sister's angel lingered near the entrance of the star, and said to the leader among those who had brought the people thither:

"Is my brother come?"

And he said "No."

She was turning hopefully away, when the child stretched out his arms and cried, "Oh, sister, I am here! Take me!" and then she turned her beaming eyes upon him, and it was night; and the star was shining in the room, making long rays down toward him as he saw it through his tears.

From that hour forth, the child looked out upon the star as on the home he was to go to when his time should come; and he thought that he did not belong to the earth alone, but to the star too, because of his sister's angel gone before.

There was a baby born to be a brother to the child; and while he was so little that he never yet had spoken a word, he stretched his tiny form out on his bed and died.

Again the child dreamed of the open star, and of the company of angels, and the train of people, and the rows of angels with their beaming eyes all turned upon those people's faces.

Said his sister's angel to the leader:

"Is my brother come?"

And he said, "Not that one, but another."

As the child beheld his brother's angel in her arms, he cried, "Oh, sister, I am here! Take me!" And she turned and smiled upon him, and the star was shining.

He grew to be a young man, and was busy at his books when an old servant came to him and said:

"Thy mother is no more. I bring her blessing on her darling son!"

Again at night he saw the star and all that former company. Said his sister's angel to the leader:

"Is my brother come?"

And he said, "Thy mother!"

A mighty cry of joy went forth through all the star, because the mother was reunited to her two children. And he stretched out his arms and cried, "Oh, mother, sister and brother, I am here! Take me!" And they answered him, "Not yet," and the star was shining.

He grew to be a man, whose hair was turning gray, and he was sitting in his chair by his fireside, heavy with grief, and with his face bedewed with tears, when the star opened once again.

Said his sister's angel to the leader: "Is my brother come?"

And he said, "Nay, but his maiden daughter."

And the man who had been the child saw his daughter, newly lost to him, a celestial creature among those three, and he said, "My daughter's head is on my sister's bosom, and her arm is around my mother's neck, and at her feet there is the baby of old time, and I can bear the parting from her, God be praised!"

And the star was shining.

Thus the child came to be an old man, and his once smooth face was wrinkled, and his steps were slow and feeble, and his back was bent. And one night as he lay upon his bed, his children standing round, he cried, as he had cried so long ago:

"I see the star!"

They whispered one another, "He is dying."

And he said, "I am. My age is falling from me like a garment, and I move toward the star as a child. And O my Father, now I thank thee that it has so often opened, to receive those dear ones who await me!"

And the star was shining; and it shines upon his grave.

OUR ENGLISH WATERING-PLACE.

In the autumn-time of the year, when the great metropolis is so much hotter, so much noisier, so much more dusty or so much more water-carted, so much more crowded, so much more disturbing and distracting in all respects, than it usually is, a quiet sea-beach becomes indeed a blessed spot. Half-awake and half-asleep, this idle morning in our sunny window on the edge of a chalk cliff in the old-fashioned watering-place to which we are a faithful resorter, we feel a lazy inclination to sketch its picture.

The place seems to respond. Sky, sea, beach, and village lie as still before us as if they were sitting for the picture. It is dead low-water. A ripple plays among the ripening corn upon the cliff, as if it were faintly trying from recollection to imitate the sea; and the world of butterflies hovering over the crop of raddish-seed are as restless in their little way as the gulls are in their larger manner when the wind blows. But the ocean lies winking in the sunlight like a drowsy lion—its glassy waters scarcely curve upon the shore—the fishing-boats in the tiny harbor are all stranded in the mud—our two colliers (our watering-place has a maritime trade employing that amount of shipping) have not an inch of water within a quarter of a mile of them, and turn, exhausted, on their sides, like faint fish of an antediluvian species. Rusty cables and chains, ropes and rings, undermost parts of posts and piles and confused timber defenses against the waves, lie strewn about, in a brown litter of tangled sea-weed and fallen cliff which looks as if a family of giants had been making tea here for ages, and had observed an untidy custom of throwing their tea-leaves on the shore.

In truth, our watering-place itself has been left somewhat high and dry by the tide of years. Concerned as we are for its honor, we must admit that the time when this pretty little semi-circular sweep of houses tapering off at the end of the wooden pier into a point in the sea, was a gay place, and when the lighthouse overlooking it shone at daybreak on company dispersing from public balls, is but dimly traditional now. There is a bleak chamber in our watering-place which is yet called the assembly "rooms," and understood to be available on hire for balls or concerts; and, some few seasons since, an ancient little gentleman came down and stayed at the hotel, who said that he had danced there, in bygone ages, with the Honorable Miss Peepy, well known to have been the beauty of her day and the cruel occasion of innumerable duels. But he was so old and shrivelled, and so very rheumatic in the legs, that it demanded more imagination than our watering-place can usually muster to believe him; therefore, except the master of the "rooms" (who to this hour wears knee-breeches, and who confirmed the statement with tears in his eyes), nobody did believe in the little lame old gentleman, or even in the Honorable Miss Peepy, long deceased.

As to subscription balls in the assembly rooms of our watering-place now, red-hot cannon-balls are less improbable. Sometimes a misguided wanderer of a ventriloquist, or an infant phenomenon, or a juggler, or somebody with an orrery that is several stars behind the time, takes the place for a night, and issues bills with the name of his last town lined out and the name of ours ignominiously written in, but you may be sure this never happens twice to the same unfortunate person. On such occasions the discolored old billiard table that is seldom played at (unless the ghost of the Honorable Miss Peepy plays at pool with other ghosts) is pushed into a corner, and benches are solemnly constituted into front seats, back seats, and reserved seats—which are much the same after you have paid—and a few dull candles are lighted—wind permitting—and the performer and the scanty audience play out a short match which shall make the other most low-spirited—which is usually a draw game. After that the performer instantly departs with maledictory expressions, and is never heard of more.

But the most wonderful feature of our assembly rooms is that an annual sale of "fancy and other china" is announced here with mysterious constancy and perseverance. Where the china comes from, where it goes to, why it is annually put up to auction when nobody ever thinks of bidding for it, how it comes to pass that it is always the same china, whether it would not have been cheaper, with the sea at hand, to have thrown it away, say in 1830, are standing enigmas. Every year the bills come out, every year the master of the rooms gets into a little pulpit on a table and offers it for sale, every year nobody buys it, every year it is put away somewhere till next year, when it appears again as if the whole thing were a new idea. We have a faint remembrance of an unearthly collection of clocks, purporting to be the work of Parisian and Genevese artists—chiefly bilious-faced clocks, supported on sickly white crutches, with their pendulums dangling like lame legs—to which a similar course of events occurred for several years, until they seemed to lapse away, of mere imbecility.

Attached to our assembly rooms is a library. There is a wheel of fortune in it, but it is rusty and dusty, and never turns. A large doll, with movable eyes, was put up to be raffled for, by twenty-five members at two shillings, seven years ago this autumn, and the list is not full yet. We are rather sanguine now that the raffle will come off next year. We think so, because we only want nine members, and should only want eight, but for number two having grown up since her name was entered and withdrawn it when she was married. Down the street there is a toy-ship of considerable burden in the same condition. Two of the boys who were entered for that raffle have gone to India in real ships since; and one was shot and died in the arms of his sister's lover, by whom he sent his last words home.

This is the library for the Minerva Press. If you want that kind of reading, come to our watering-place. The leaves of the romances, reduced to a condition very like curl-paper, are thickly studded with notes in pencil: sometimes complimentary, sometimes jocose. Some of these commentators, like commentators in a more extensive way, quarrel with one another. One young gentleman who sarcastically writes "Oh ! ! !" after every sentimental passage is pursued through his literary career by another, who writes "Insulting beast!" Miss Julia Mills has read the whole collection of these books. She has left marginal notes on the pages, as "Is not this truly touching? J. M." "How thrilling! J. M." "Entranced here by the magician's potent spell. J. M." She has also italicized her favorite traits in the description of the hero, as "his hair, which was *dark* and *wavy*, clustered in *rich profusion* around a *marble brow*, whose lofty paleness bespoke the intellect within." It reminds her of another hero. She adds, "How like B. L. Can this be mere coincidence? J. M."

You would hardly guess which is the main street of our watering-place, but you may know it by its being always stopped up with donkey-chaises. Whenever you come here and see harnessed donkeys eating clover out of barrows drawn completely across a narrow thoroughfare, you may be quite sure you are in our High Street. Our police you may know by his uniform, likewise by his never on any account interfering with anybody—especially the tramps and vagabonds. In our fancy shops we have a capital collection of damaged goods, among which the flies of countless summers "have been roaming." We are great in obsolete seals, and in faded pin-cushions, and in rickety camp-stools, and in exploded cutlery, and in miniature vessels, and in stunted little telescopes, and in objects made of shells that pretend not to be shells. Diminutive spades, barrows, and baskets are our principal articles of commerce; but even they don't look quite new somehow. They always seem to have been offered and refused somewhere else, before they came down to our watering-place.

Yet it must not be supposed that our watering-place is an empty place, deserted by all visitors except a few stanch persons of approved fidelity. On the contrary, the chances are that if you come down here in August or September, you wouldn't find a house to lay your head in. As to finding either house or lodging of which you could reduce the terms, you could scarcely engage in a more hopeless pursuit. For all this, you are to observe that every season is the worst season ever known, and that the householding population of our watering-place are ruined regularly every autumn. They are like the farmers, in regard that it is surprising how much ruin they will bear. We have an excellent hotel—capital baths, warm, cold, and shower—first-rate bathing-machines--and as good butchers, bakers, and grocers as heart could desire. They all do business, it is to be presumed, from motives of philanthropy—but it is quite certain that they are all being ruined. Their interest in strangers and their politeness under ruin bespeak their amiable nature. You would say so if you only saw the baker helping a new-comer to find suitable apartments.

So far from being at a discount as to company, we are in fact what would popularly be called rather a nobby place. Some tip-top "nobb" come down occasionally—even dukes and duchesses. We have known such carriages to blaze among the donkey-chaises as made beholders wink. Attendant on these equipages come resplendent creatures in plush and powder, who are sure to be stricken disgusted with the indifferent accommodation of our watering-place, and who, of an evening (particularly when it rains), may be seen very much out of drawing, in rooms far too small for their fine figures, looking discontentedly out of little back windows into by-streets. The lords and ladies get on well enough and quite good-humoredly; but if you want to see the gorgeous phenomena who wait upon them at a perfect non-plus, you should come and look at the resplendent creatures with little back parlors for servants' halls, and turn-up bedsteads to sleep in, at our watering-place. You have no idea how they take it to heart.

We have a pier—a queer old wooden pier, fortunately without the slightest pretensions to architecture, and very picturesque in consequence. Boats are hauled up upon it, ropes are coiled all over it; lobster-pots, nets, masts, oars, spars, sails, ballast, and rickety capstans make a perfect labyrinth of it. Forever hovering about this pier, with their hands in their pockets, or leaning over the rough bulwark it opposes to the sea, gazing through telescopes which they carry about in the same profound receptacles, are the boatmen of our watering-place. Looking at them, you would say that surely these must be the laziest boatmen in the world. They lounge about, in obstinate and inflexible pantaloons, that were apparently made of wood, the whole season through. Whether talking together about the shipping in the Channel, or gruffly unbending over mugs of beer at the public-house, you would consider them the slowest of men. The chances are a thousand to one that you might stay here for ten seasons and never see a boatman in a hurry. A certain expression about his loose hands when they are not in his pockets, as if he were carrying a considerable lump of iron in each, without any inconvenience, suggests strength, but he never seems to use it. He has the appearance of perpetually strolling —running is too inappropriate a word to be thought of— to seed. The only subject on which he seems to feel any approach to enthusiasm is pitch. He pitches everything he can lay hold of—the pier, the palings, his boat, his house—when there is nothing else left he turns to and even pitches his hat, or his rough-weather clothing. Do not judge him by deceitful appearances. These are among the bravest and most skilful mariners that exist. Let a gale arise and swell into a storm, let a sea run that might appal the stoutest heart that ever beat, let the light-boat on these dangerous sands throw up a rocket in the night, or let them hear through the angry roar the signal-guns of a ship in distress, and these men spring up into activity so dauntless, so valiant and heroic that the world cannot surpass it. Cavilers may object that they chiefly live upon the salvage of valuable cargoes. So they do, and God knows it is no great living that they get out of the deadly risks they run. But put that hope of gain aside. Let these rough fellows be asked, in any storm, who volunteers for the life-boat to save some perishing souls, as poor and empty-handed as themselves, whose lives the perfection of human reason does not rate at the value of a farthing each; and that boat will be manned as surely and as cheerfully as if a thousand pounds were told down on the weather-beaten pier. For this and for the recollection of their comrades whom we have known, whom the raging sea has ingulfed before their children's eyes in such brave efforts, whom the secret sand has buried, we hold the boatmen of our watering-place in our love and honor, and are tender of the fame they well deserve.

So many children are brought down to our watering-place that when they are not out of doors, as they usually are in fine weather, it is wonderful where they are put: the whole village seeming much too small to hold them under cover. In the afternoon, you see no end of salt and sandy little boots drying on upper window-sills. At bathing-time in the morning, the little bay reëchoes with every shrill variety of shriek and splash—after which, if the weather be at all fresh, the sands team with small blue-mottled legs. The sands are the children's great resort. They cluster there like ants: so busy burying their particular friends, and making castles with infinite labor which the next tide overthrows, that it is curious to consider how their play, to the music of the sea, foreshadows the realities of their after-lives.

It is curious, too, to observe a natural ease of approach that there seems to be between the children and the boatmen. They mutually make acquaintance and take individual likings without any help. You will come upon one of those slow, heavy fellows sitting down patiently mending a little ship for a mite of a boy whom he could crush to death by throwing his lightest pair of trousers on him. You will be sensible of the oddest contrast between the smooth little creature and the rough man who seems to be carved out of hard-grained wood—between the delicate hand expectantly held out and the immense thumb and finger that can hardly feel the rigging of thread they mend—between the small voice and the gruff growl—and yet there is a natural propriety in the companionship: always to be noted in confidence between a child and a person who has any merit of reality and genuineness: which is admirably pleasant.

We have a preventive station at our watering-place, and much the same thing may be observed—in a lesser degree, because of their official character—of the coast blockade; a steady, trusty, well-conditioned, well-conducted set of men, with no misgiving about looking you full in the face, and with a quiet, thorough-going way of passing along to their duty at night, carrying huge sou'-wester clothing in reserve, that is fraught with all good prepossession. They are handy fellows—neat about their houses—industrious at gardening—would get on with their wives, one thinks, in a desert island—and people it, too, soon.

As to the naval officer of the station, with his hearty fresh face and his blue eye that has pierced all kinds of weather, it warms our hearts when he comes into church on a Sunday, with that bright mixture of blue coat, buff waistcoat, black neck-kerchief, and gold epaulette that is associated in the minds of all Englishmen with brave, unpretending, cordial national service. We like to look at him in his Sunday state; and if we were first lord (really possessing the indispensable qualification for the office of knowing nothing whatever about the sea) we would give him a ship to-morrow.

We have a church, by the bye, of course—a hideous temple of flint, like a great petrified haystack. Our chief clerical dignitary, who, to his honor, has done much for education both in time and money and has established excellent schools, is a sound, shrewd, healthy gentleman, who has got into little occasional difficulties with the neighboring farmers, but has had a pestilent trick of being right. Under a new regulation he has yielded the church of our watering-place to another clergyman. Upon the whole we get on in church well. We are a little bilious sometimes about these days of fraternization and about nations arriving at a new and more unprejudiced knowledge of each other (which our Christianity don't quite approve), but it soon goes off, and then we get on very well.

There are two dissenting chapels, besides, in our small watering-place; being in about the proportion of a hundred and twenty guns to a yacht. But the dissension that has torn us lately has not been a religious one. It has arisen on the novel question of gas. Our watering-place has been convulsed by the agitation, gas or no gas. It was never reasoned why no gas, but there was a great no gas party. Broadsides were printed and stuck about—a startling circumstance in our watering-place. The no gas party rested content with chalking "no gas!" and "down with gas!" and other such angry war-whoops on the few back gates and scraps of wall which the limits of our watering-place afford; but the gas party printed and posted bills, wherein they took the high ground of proclaiming against the no gas party, that it was said let there be light and there was light; and that not to have light (that is gaslight) in our watering-place was to contravene the great decree. Whether by these thunderbolts or not, the no gas party were defeated; and in this present season we have had our handful of shops illuminated for the first time. Such of the no gas party, however, as have got shops remain in opposition and burn tallow—exhibiting in their windows the very picture of the sulkiness that punishes itself, and a new illustration of the old adage about cutting off your nose to be revenged on your face, in cutting off their gas to be revenged on their business.

Other population than we have indicated our watering-place has none. There are a few old used-up boatmen who creep about in the sunlight with the help of sticks, and there is a poor imbecile shoemaker who wanders his lonely life away among the rocks, as if he were looking for his reason—which he will never find. Sojourners in neighboring watering-places come occasionally in flies to stare at us, and drive away again as if they thought us very dull; Italian boys come; Punch comes, the Fantoccini come, the tumblers come, the Ethiopians come; glee-singers come at night and hum and vibrate (not always melodiously) under our windows. But they all go soon, and leave us to ourselves again. We once had a traveling circus and Wombwell's menagerie at the same time. They both know better than ever to try it again; and the menagerie had nearly razed us from the face of the earth in getting the elephant away—his caravan was so large and the watering-place so small. We have a fine sea, wholesome for all people; profitable for the body, profitable for the mind. The poet's words are sometimes on its awful lips:

"And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!

"Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

Yet it is not always so, for the speech of the sea is various and wants not abundant resource of cheerfulnes, hope, and lusty encouragement. And since I have been idling at the window here the tide has risen. The boats are dancing on the bubbling water; the colliers are afloat again? the white-bordered waves rush in; the children

"Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
When he comes back;"

the radiant sails are gliding past the shore and shining on the far horizon; all the sea is sparkling, heaving, swelling up with life and beauty, this bright morning.

OUR FRENCH WATERING-PLACE.

HAVING earned, by many years of fidelity, the right to be sometimes inconstant to our English watering-place, we have dallied for two or three seasons with a French watering-place: once solely known to us as a town with a very long street, beginning with an abattoir and ending with a steamboat, which it seemed our fate to behold only at daybreak on winter mornings, when (in the days before continental railroads), just sufficiently awake to know that we were most uncomfortably asleep, it was our destiny always to clatter through it, in the coupé of the diligence from Paris, with a sea of mud behind us and a sea of tumbling waves before. In relation to which latter monster, our mind's eye now recalls a worthy Frenchman in a seal-skin cap with a braided hood over it, once our traveling companion in the coupé aforesaid, who, waking up with pale and crumpled visage, and looking ruefully out at the grim row of breakers enjoying themselves fanatically on an instrument of torture called "the bar," inquired of us whether we were ever sick at sea. Both to prepare his mind for the abject creature we were presently to become, and also to afford him consolation, we replied, "Sir, your servant is always sick when it is possible to be so." He returned, altogether uncheered by the bright example, "Ah, Heaven, but I am always sick, even when it is impossible to be so."

The means of communication between the French capital and our French watering-place are wholly changed since those days; but the Channel remains unbridged as yet, and the old floundering and knocking about go on there. It must be confessed that saving in reasonable (and therefore rare) sea-weather, the act of arrival at our French watering-place from England is difficult to be achieved with dignity. Several little circumstances combine to render the visitor an object of humiliation. In the first place, the steamer no sooner touches the port than all the passengers fall into captivity: being boarded by an overpowering force of custom-house officers and marched into a gloomy dungeon. In the second place, the road to this dungeon is fenced off with ropes breast-high, and outside those ropes all the English in the place who have lately been sea-sick, and are now well, assemble in their best clothes to enjoy the degradation of their dilapidated fellow-creatures. "Oh, my gracious! how ill this one has been!" "Here's a damp one coming next!" "Here's a pale one!" "Oh! Ain't he green in the face, this next one!" Even we ourself (not deficient in natural dignity) have a lively remembrance of staggering up this detested lane one September day in a gale of wind, when we were received like an irresistible comic actor, with a burst of laughter and applause, occasioned by the extreme imbecility of our legs.

We were coming to the third place. In the third place, the captives, being shut up in the gloomy dungeon, are strained, two or three at a time, into an inner cell, to be examined as to passports; and across the doorway of communication stands a military creature making a bar of his arm. Two ideas are generally present to the British mind during these ceremonies: first, that it is necessary to make for the cell with violent struggles, as if it were a life-boat and the dungeon a ship going down; secondly, that the military creature's arm is a national affront, which the government at home ought instantly to "take up." The British mind and body becoming heated by these fantasies, delirious answers are made to inquiries and extravagant actions performed. Thus Johnson persists in giving Johnson as his baptismal name, and substituting for his ancestral designation the national "dam!" Neither can he by any means be brought to recognize the distinction between a portmanteau-key and a passport, but will obstinately persevere in tendering the one when asked for the other. This brings him to the fourth place in a state of mere idiocy; and when he is, in the fourth place, cast out at a little door into a howling wilderness of touters, he becomes a lunatic with wild eyes and floating hair until rescued and soothed. If friendless and unrescued, he is generally put into a railway omnibus and taken to Paris.

But our French watering-place, when it is once got into, is a very enjoyable place. It has a varied and beautiful country around it, and many characteristic and agreeable things within. To be sure, it might have fewer bad smells and less decaying refuse, and it might be better drained, and much cleaner in many parts, and therefore infinitely more healthy. Still, it is a bright, airy, pleasant, cheerful town; and if you were to walk down either of its three well-paved main streets toward five o'clock in the afternoon, when delicate odors of cookery fill the air, and its hotel windows (it is full of hotels) give glimpses of long tables set out for dinner, and made to look sumptuous by the aid of napkins folded fan-wise, you would rightly judge it to be an uncommonly good town to eat and drink in.

We have an old walled town, rich in cool public wells of water, on the top of a hill within and above the present business town; and if it were some hundreds of miles further from England, instead of being, on a clear day, within sight of the grass growing in the crevices of the chalk cliffs of Dover, you would long ago have been bored to death about that town. It is more picturesque and quaint than half the innocent places which tourists, following their leader like sheep, have made impostors of. To say nothing of its houses with grave court-yards, its queer by-corners, and its many-windowed streets white and quiet in the sunlight, there is an ancient belfry in it that would have been in all the annuals and albums, going and gone, these hundred years, if it had but been more expensive to get at. Happily it has escaped so well, being only in our French watering-place, that you may like it of your own accord in a natural manner, without being required to go into convulsions about it. We regard it as one of the later blessings of our life that Bilkins, the only authority on taste, never took any notice that we can find out, of our French watering-place. Bilkins never wrote about it, never pointed out anything to be seen in it, never measured anything in it, always left it alone. For which relief, Heaven bless the town and the memory of the immortal Bilkins likewise!

There is a charming walk, arched and shaded by trees, on the old walls that form the four sides of this high town, whence you get glimpses of the street below and changing views of the other town and of the river and of the hills and of the sea. It is made more agreeable and peculiar by some of the solemn houses that are rooted in the deep streets below, bursting into a fresher existence atop; and having doors and windows, and even gardens, on these ramparts. A child going in at the court-yard gate of one of these houses, climbing up the many stairs, and coming out at the fourth-floor window, might conceive himself another Jack alighting on enchanted ground from another bean-stalk. It is a place wonderfully populous in children; English children, with governesses reading novels as they walk down the shady lanes of trees, or nursemaids interchanging gossip on the seats; French children with their smiling *bonnes* in snow-white caps and themselves—if little boys—in straw head-gear like beehives, work-baskets, and church hassocks. Three years ago there were three weazen old men, one bearing a frayed red ribbon in his threadbare button-hole, always to be found walking together among these children before dinner-time. If they walked for an appetite, they doubtless lived *en pension*—were contracted for—otherwise their poverty would have made it a rash action. They were stooping, blear-eyed, dull old men, slip-shod and shabby, in long-skirted, short-waisted coats and meager trousers, and yet with a ghost of gentility hovering in their company. They spoke little to each other, and looked as if they might have been politically discontented if they had had vitality enough. Once we overheard red-ribbon feebly complain to the other two that somebody, or something, was "a robber;" and then they all three set their mouths so that they would have ground their teeth if they had had any. The ensuing winter gathered red-ribbon unto the great company of faded ribbons, and next year the remaining two were there—getting themselves entangled with hoops and dolls—familiar mysteries to the children—probably in the eyes of most of them harmless creatures who had never been like children, and whom children could never be like. Another winter came, and another old man went, and so this present year the last of the triumvirate left off walking—it was no good now—and sat by himself on a solitary bench, with the hoops and the dolls as lively as ever all about him.

In the Place d'Armes of this town a little decayed market is held, which seems to slip through the old gateway like water and go rippling down the hill, to mingle with the murmuring market in the lower town and get lost in its movement and bustle. It is very agreeable on an idle summer morning to pursue this market stream from the hilltop. It begins, dozingly and dully, with a few sacks of corn; starts into a surprising collection of boots and shoes; goes brawling down the hill in a diversified channel of old cordage, old iron, old crockery, old clothes, civil and military, old rags, new cotton goods, flaming prints of saints, little looking-glasses, and incalculable lengths of tape; dives into a back way, keeping out of sight for a little while, as streams will, or only sparkling for a moment in the shape of a market drinking-shop; and suddenly reappears behind the great church, shooting itself into a bright confusion of white-capped women and blue-bloused men, poultry, vegetables, fruits, flowers, pots, pans, praying-chairs, soldiers, country butter, umbrellas and other sun-shades, girl porters waiting to be hired with baskets at their backs, and one weazen little old man in a cocked hat, wearing a cuirass of drinking-glasses and carrying on his shoulder a crimson temple fluttering with flags, like a glorified paver's rammer without the handle, who rings a little bell in all parts of the scene, and cries his cooling drink Hola! hola! ho-o-o! in a shrill cracked voice that somehow makes itself heard above all the chaffering and vending hum. Early in the afternoon the whole course of the stream is dry. The praying-chairs are put back in the church, the umbrellas are folded up, the unsold goods are carried away, the stalls and stands disappear, the square is swept, the hackney coaches lounge there to be hired, and on all the country roads (if you walk about as much as we do) you will see the peasant women, always neatly and comfortably dressed, riding home with the pleasantest saddle-furniture of clean milk-pails, bright butter-kegs, and the like on the jolliest little donkeys in the world.

We have another market in our French watering-place—that is to say, a few wooden hutches in the open street down by the port—devoted to fish. Our fishing-boats are famous everywhere; and our fishing people, though they love lively colors and taste a neutral (see Bilkins), are among the most picturesque people we ever encountered. They have not only a quarter of their own in the town itself, but they occupy whole villages of their own on the neighboring cliffs. Their churches and chapels are their own; they consort with one another, they intermarry among themselves, their customs are their own, and their costume is their own and never changes. As soon as one of their boys can walk he is provided with a long bright red nightcap; and one of their men would as soon think of going afloat without his head as without that indispensable appendage to it. Then they wear the noblest boots, with the hugest tops—flapping and bulging over anyhow; above which they incase themselves in such wonderful overalls and petticoat trousers, made to all appearance of tarry old sails, so additionlly stiffened with pitch and salt that the wearers have a walk of their own, and go straddling and swinging about among the boats and barrels and nets and rigging, a sight to see. Then their younger women, by dint of going down to the sea barefoot, to fling their baskets into the boats as they come in with the tide, and bespeak the first fruits of the haul with propitiatory promises to love and marry that dear fisherman who shall fill that basket like an angel, have the finest legs ever carved by nature in the brightest mahogany, and they walk like Juno. Their eyes, too, are so lustrous that their long gold ear-rings turn dull beside those brilliant neighbors; and when they are dressed, what with these beauties, and their fine fresh faces, and their many petticoats—striped petticoats, red petticoats, blue petticoats, always clean and smart and never too long—and their home-made stockings, mulberry-colored, blue, brown, purple, lilac—which the old women, taking care of the Dutch-looking children, sit in all sorts of places knitting, knitting, knitting, from morning to night—and what with their little saucy bright blue jackets, knitted too, and fitting close to their handsome figures; and what with the natural grace with which they wear the commonest cap or fold the commonest handkerchief round their luxuriant hair—we say, in a word and out of breath, that taking all these premises into our consideration, it has never been a matter of the least surprise to us that we have never once met, in the corn-fields, on the dusty roads, by the breezy windmills, on the plots of short sweet grass overhanging the sea—anywhere—a young fisherman and fisherwoman of our French watering-place together, but the arm of that fisherman has invariably been, as a matter of course and without any absurd attempt to disguise so plain a necessity, round the neck or waist of that fisherwoman. And we have had no doubt whatever, standing looking at their uphill streets, house rising above house and terrace above terrace, and bright garments here and there lying sunning on rough stone parapets, that the pleasant mist on all such objects, caused by their being seen through the brown nets hung across on poles to dry, is, in the very eyes of every true young fisherman, a mist of love and beauty, setting off the goddess of his heart.

Moreover, it is to be observed that these are an industrious people, and a domestic people, and an honest people. And though we are aware that at the bidding of Bilkins it is our duty to fall down and worship the Neapolitans, we make bold very much to prefer the fishing people of our French watering-place—especially since our last visit to Naples within these twelve months, when we found only four conditions of men remaining in the whole city: to wit, lazzaroni, priests, spies, and soldiers, and all of them beggars; the paternal government having banished all its subjects except the rascals.

But we can never henceforth separate our French watering-place from our own landlord of two summers, M. Loyal Devasseur, citizen and town-councilor. Permit us to have the pleasure of presenting M. Loyal Devasseur.

His own family name is simply Loyal; but as he is married, and as in that part of France a husband always adds to his own name the family name of his wife, he writes himself Loyal Devasseur. He owns a compact little estate of some twenty or thirty acres on a lofty hillside, and on it he has built two country houses which he lets furnished. They are by many degrees the best houses that are so let near our French watering-place; we have had the honor of living in both and can testify. The entrance hall of the first we inhabited was ornamented with a plan of the estate, representing it as about twice the size of Ireland, insomuch that when we were yet new to the property (M. Loyal always speaks of it as "*la propriété*") we went three miles straight on end in search of the bridge of Austerlitz—which we afterward found to be immediately outside the window. The chateau of the Old Guard, in another part of the grounds, and, according to the plan, about two leagues from the little dining-room, we sought in vain for a week, until, happening one evening to sit upon a bench in the forest (forest in the plan), a few yards from the house door, we observed at our feet, in the ignominious circumstances of being upside down and greenly rotten, the Old Guard himself: that is to say, the painted effigy of a member of that distinguished corps, seven feet high, and in the act of carrying arms, who had had the misfortune to be blown down in the previous winter. It will be perceived that M. Loyal is a stanch admirer of the great Napoleon. He is an old soldier himself —captain of the National Guard, with a handsome gold vase on his chimney-piece presented to him by his company—and his respect for the memory of the illustrious general is enthusiastic. Medallions of him, portraits of him, busts of him, pictures of him, are thickly sprinkled all over the property. During the first month of our occupation it was our affliction to be constantly knocking down Napoleon: if we touched a shelf in a dark corner, he toppled over with a crash; and every door we opened shook him to the soul. Yet M. Loyal is not a man of mere castles in the air, or, as he would say, in Spain. He has a specially practical, contriving, clever, skillful eye and hand. His houses are delightful. He unites French elegance and English comfort in a happy manner quite his own. He has an extraordinary genius for making tasteful little bedrooms in angles of his roofs, which an Englishman would as soon think of turning to any account as he would think of cultivating the desert. We have ourself reposed deliciously in an elegant chamber of M. Loyal's construction, with our head as nearly in the kitchen chimney-pot as we can conceive it likely for the head of any gentleman, not by profession a sweep, to be. And into whatsoever strange nook M. Loyal's genius penetrates, it in that nook infallibly constructs a cupboard and a row of pegs. In either of our houses we could have put away the knapsacks and hung up the hats of the whole regiment of guides.

Aforetime, M. Loyal was a tradesman in the town. You can transact business with no present tradesman in the town, and give your card "chez M. Loyal," but a brighter face shines upon you directly. We doubt if there is, ever was, or ever will be a man so universally pleasant in the minds of people as M. Loyal is in the minds of the citizens of our French watering-place. They rub their hands and laugh when they speak of him. Ah, but he is such a good child, such a brave boy, such a generous spirit, that Monsieur Loyal! It is the honest truth. M. Loyal's nature is the nature of a gentleman. He cultivates his ground with his own hands (assisted by one little laborer, who falls into a fit now and then) and he digs and delves from morn to eve in prodigious perspirations—"works always," as he says—but cover him with dust, mud, weeds, water, any stains you will, you never can cover the gentleman in M. Loyal. A portly, upright, broad-shouldered, brown-faced man, whose soldierly bearing gives him the appearance of being taller than he is, look into the bright eye of M. Loyal, standing before you in his working blouse and cap, not particularly well shaved, and it may be very earthy, and you shall discern in M. Loyal a gentleman whose true politeness is ingrain, and confirmation of whose word by his bond you would blush to think of. Not without reason is M. Loyal when he tells that history, in his own vivacious way, of his traveling to Fulham, near London, to buy all these hundreds and hundreds of trees you now see upon the property, then a bare, bleak hill; and of his sojourning in Fulham three months; and of his jovial evenings with the market-gardeners; and of the crowning banquet before his departure, when the market-gardeners rose as one man, clinked their glasses all together (as the custom at Fulham is), and cried, "*Vive* Loyal!"

M. Loyal has an agreeable wife, but no family; and he loves to drill the children of his tenants, or run races with them, or do anything with them or for them that is good-natured. He is of a highly convivial temperament and his hospitality is unbounded. Billet a soldier on him and he is delighted. Thirty-five soldiers had M. Loyal billeted on him this present summer, and they all got fat and red-faced in two days. It became a legend among the troops that whosoever got billeted on M. Loyal rolled in clover; and so it fell out that the fortunate man who drew the billet "M. Loyal Devasseur" always leaped into the air, though in heavy marching order. M. Loyal cannot bear to admit anything that might seem by any implication to disparage the military profession. We hinted to him once that we were conscious of a remote doubt arising in our mind whether a sou a day for pocket-money, tobacco, stockings, drink, washing, and social pleasures in general left a very large margin for a soldier's enjoyment. Pardon! said M. Loyal, rather wincing. It was not a fortune, but *à la bonne heure*—it was better than it used to be! What, we asked him on another occasion, were all those neighboring peasants, each living with his family in one room, and each having a soldier (perhaps two) billeted on him every other night, required to provide for those soldiers? "Faith!" said M. Loyal reluctantly; "a bed, monsieur, and fire to cook with, and a candle. And they share their supper with those soldiers. It is not possible that they could eat alone." "And what allowance do they get for this?" said we. Monsieur Loyal drew himself up taller, took a step back, laid his hand upon his breast, and said with majesty, as speaking for himself and all France, "Monsieur, it is a contribution to the State!"

It is never going to rain, according to M. Loyal. When it is impossible to deny that it is now raining in torrents, he says it will be fine—charming—magnificent—to-morrow. It is never hot on the property, he contends. Likewise it is never cold. The flowers, he says, come out, delighting to grow there; it is like Paradise this morning; it is like the Garden of Eden. He is a little fanciful in his language: smilingly observing of Madame Loyal, when she is absent at vespers, that she is "gone to her salvation"—*allé à son salut.* He has a great enjoyment of tobacco, but nothing would induce him to continue smoking face to face with a lady. His short black pipe immediately goes into his breast-pocket, scorches his blouse, and nearly sets him on fire. In the town council and on occasions of ceremony he appears in a full suit of black, with a waistcoat of magnificent breadth across the chest and a shirt-collar of fabulous proportions. Good M. Loyal! Under blouse or waistcoat, he carries one of the gentlest hearts that beat in a nation teeming with gentle people. He has had losses, and has been at his best under them. Not only the loss of his way by night in the Fulham times—when a bad subject of an Englishman, under pretense of seeing him home, took him into all the night public-houses, drank "arfanarf" in every one at his expense, and finally fled, leaving him shipwrecked at Cleefeeway, which we apprehend to be Ratcliff Highway—but heavier losses than that. Long ago a family of children and a mother were left in one of his houses without money a whole year. M. Loyal—anything but as rich as we wish he had been—had not the heart to say "you must go;" so they stayed on and stayed on, and paying tenants who would have come in couldn't come in, and at last they managed to get helped home across the water; and M. Loyal kissed the whole group and said, "Adieu, my poor infants!" and sat down in their deserted saloon and smoked his pipe of peace. "The rent, M. Loyal?" "Eh! well! The rent!" M. Loyal shakes his head. "*Le bon Dieu,*" says M. Loyal presently, "will recompense me," and he laughs and smokes his pipe of peace. May he smoke it on the property, and not be recompensed, these fifty years!

There are public amusements in our French watering-place, or it would not be French. They are very popular and very cheap. The sea-bathing—which may rank as the most favored daylight entertainment, inasmuch as the French visitors bathe all day long, and seldom appear to think of remaining less than an hour at a time in the water—is astoundingly cheap. Omnibuses convey you, if you please, from a convenient part of the town to the beach and back again; you have a clean and comfortable bathing-machine, dress, linen, and all appliances; and the charge for the whole is half a franc, or fivepence. On the pier there is usually a guitar, which seems presumptuously enough to set its tinkling against the deep hoarseness of the sea, and there is always some boy or woman who sings, without any voice, little songs without any tune: the strain we have most frequently heard being an appeal to "the sportsman" not to bag that choicest of game, the swallow. For bathing purposes we have also a subscription establishment with an esplanade, where people lounge about with telescopes and seem to get a good deal of weariness for their money; and we have also an association of individual machine proprietors combined against this formidable rival. M. Féroce, our own particular friend in the bathing line, is one of these. How he ever came by his name we cannot imagine. He is as gentle and polite a man as M. Loyal Devasseur himself; immensely stout withal; and of a beaming aspect. M. Féroce has saved so many people from drowning, and has been decorated with so many medals in consequence, that his stoutness seems a special dispensation of Providence to enable him to wear them; if his girth were the girth of an ordinary man, he could never hang them on all at once. It is only on very great occasions that M. Féroce displays his shining honors. At other times they lie by, with rolls of manuscript testifying to the causes of their presentation, in a huge glass case in the red-sofaed saloon of his private residence on the beach, where M. Féroce also keeps his family pictures, his portraits of himself as he appears both in bathing life and in private life, his little boats that rock by clockwork, and his other ornamental possessions.

Then we have a commodious and gay theater—or had, for it is burned down now—where the opera was always preceded by a vaudeville, in which (as usual) everybody, down to the little old man with the large hat and the little cane and tassel, who always played either my uncle or my papa, suddenly broke out of the dialogue into the mildest vocal snatches, to the great perplexity of unaccustomed strangers from Great Britain, who never could make out when they were singing and when they were talking—and indeed it was pretty much the same. But the caterers in the way of entertainment to whom we are most beholden are the Society of Welldoing, who are active all the summer and give the proceeds of their good works to the poor. Some of the most agreeable *fêtes* they contrive are announced as "dedicated to the children;" and the taste with which they turn a small public inclosure into an elegant garden beautifully illuminated, and the thoroughgoing heartiness and energy with which they personally direct the childish pleasures, are supremely delightful. For fivepence a head we have on these occasions donkey races with English "jokeis" and other rustic sports; lotteries for toys; roundabouts, dancing on the grass to the music of an admirable band, fire-balloons and fireworks. Further, almost every week all through the summer—never mind, now, on what day of the week—there is a *fête* in some adjoining village (called in that part of the country a ducasse), where the people—really the people—dance on the green turf in the open air round a little orchestra, that seems itself to dance, there is such an airy motion of flags and streamers all about it. And we do not suppose that between the torrid zone and the north pole there are to be found male dancers with such astonishingly loose legs, furnished with so many joints in wrong places, utterly unknown to Professor Owen, as those who here disport themsevles. Sometimes the *fête* appertains to a particular trade; you will see among the cheerful young women at the joint ducasse of the milliners and tailors a wholesome knowledge of the art of making common and cheap things uncommon and pretty, by good sense and good taste, that is a practical lesson to any rank of society in a whole island we could mention. The oddest feature of these agreeable scenes is the everlasting roundabout (we preserve an English word wherever we can, as we are writing the English language), on the wooden horses of which machine grown-up people of all ages are wound round and round with the utmost solemnity, while the proprietor's wife grinds an organ, capable of only one tune, in the center.

As to the boarding-houses of our French watering-place, they are legion, and would require a distinct treatise. It is not without a sentiment of national pride that we believe them to contain more bores from the shores of Albion than all the clubs in London. As you walk timidly in their neighborhood, the very neck-cloths and hats of your elderly compatriots cry to you from the stones of the streets: "We are bores—avoid us!" We have never overheard at street-corners such lunatic scraps of political and social discussion as among these dear countrymen of ours. They believe everything that is impossible and nothing that is true. They carry rumors, and ask questions, and make corrections and improvements on one another, staggering to the human intellect. And they are forever rushing into the English library, propounding such incomprehensible paradoxes to the fair mistress of that establishment that we beg to recommend her to her majesty's gracious consideration as a fit object for a pension.

The English form a considerable part of the population of our French watering-place, and are deservedly addressed and respected in many ways. Some of the surface addresses to them are odd enough, as when a laundress puts a placard outside her house announcing her possession of that curious British instrument, a "mingle;" or when a tavern-keeper provides accommodation for the celebrated English game of "Nokemdon." But to us it is not the least pleasant feature of our French watering-place that a long and constant fusion of the two great nations there has taught each to like the other, and to learn from the other, and to rise superior to the absurd prejudices that have lingered among the weak and ignorant in both countries equally.

Drumming and trumpeting of course go on forever in our French watering-place. Flag-flying is at a premium, too; but we cheerfully avow that we consider a flag a very pretty object, and that we take such outward signs of innocent liveliness to our heart of hearts. The people in the town and in the country are a busy people who work hard; they are sober, temperate, good-humored, light-hearted, and generally remarkable for their engaging manners. Few just men, not immoderately bilious, could see them in their recreations without very much respecting the character that is so easily, so harmlessly, and so simply pleased.

BILL-STICKING.

If I had an enemy whom I hated—which Heaven forbid!—and if I knew of something which sat heavy on his conscience, I think I would introduce that something into a posting-bill and place a large impression in the hands of an active sticker. I can scarcely imagine a more terrible revenge. I should haunt him by this means night and day. I do not mean to say that I would publish his secret, in red letters two feet high, for all the town to read: I would darkly refer to it. It should be between him and me and the posting-bills. Say, for example, that at a certain period of his life my enemy had surreptitiously possessed himself of a key. I would then embark my capital in the lock business and conduct that business on the advertising principle. In all my placards and advertisements I would throw up the line secret keys. Thus if my enemy passed an uninhabited house he would see his conscience glaring down on him from the parapets and peeping up at him from the cellars. If he took a dead wall in his walk it would be alive with reproaches. If he sought refuge in an omnibus the panels thereof would become Belshazzar's palace to him. If he took a boat, in a wild endeavor to escape, he would see the fatal words lurking under the arches of the bridges over the Thames. If he walked the streets with downcast eyes, he would recoil from the very stones of the pavement, made eloquent by lampblack lithograph. If he drove or rode, his way would be blocked up by enormous vans, each proclaiming the same words over and over again from its whole extent of surface. Until, having gradually grown thinner and paler, and having at last totally rejected food, he would miserably perish, and I should be revenged. This conclusion I should, no doubt, celebrate by laughing a hoarse laugh in three syllables, and folding my arms tight upon my chest agreeably to most of the examples of glutted animosity that I have had an opportunity of observing in connection with the drama—which, by the bye, as involving a good deal of noise, appears to me to be occasionally confounded with the drummer.

The foregoing reflections presented themselves to my mind the other day as I contemplated (being newly come to London from the East Riding of Yorkshire, on a house-hunting expedition for next May) an old warehouse which rotting paste and rotting paper had brought down to the condition of an old cheese. It would have been impossible to say, on the most conscientious survey, how much of its front was brick and mortar and how much decaying and decayed plaster. It was so thickly incrusted with fragments of bills that no ship's keel after a long voyage could be half so foul. All traces of the broken windows were billed out, the doors were billed across, the water-spout was billed over. The building was shored up to prevent its tumbling into the street; and the very beams erected against it were less wood than paste and paper, they had been so continually posted and reposted. The forlorn dregs of old posters so incumbered this wreck that there was no hold for new posters, and the stickers had abandoned the place in despair, except one enterprising man who had hoisted the last masquerade to a clear spot near the level of the stack of chimneys, where it waved and drooped like a shattered flag. Below the rusty cellar-grating, crumpled remnants of old bills torn down rotted away in wasting heaps of fallen leaves. Here and there some of the thick rind of the house had peeled off in strips and fluttered heavily down, littering the street; but still below these rents and gashes layers of decomposing posters showed themselves, as if they were interminable. I thought the building could never even be pulled down but in one adhesive heap of rottenness and poster. As to getting in—I don't believe that if the Sleeping Beauty and her court had been so billed up the young prince could have done it.

Knowing all the posters that were yet legible intimately, and pondering on their ubiquitous nature, I was led into the reflections with which I began this paper by considering what an awful thing it would be ever to have wronged—say M. Jullien, for example—and to have his avenging name in characters of fire incessantly before my eyes. Or to have injured Madam Tussaud and undergo a similar retribution. Has any man a self-reproachful thought associated with pills or ointment? What an avenging spirit to that man is Professor Holloway! Have I sinned in oil? Cabburn pursues me. Have I a dark remembrance associated with any gentlemanly garments, bespoke or ready made? Moses & Son are on my track. Did I ever aim a blow at a defenseless fellow-creature's head? That head eternally being measured for a wig, or that worse head which was bald before it used the balsam and hirsute afterward—enforcing the benevolent moral, "Better to be bald as a Dutch cheese than come to this"—undoes me. Have I no sore places in my mind which Mechi touches—which Nicoll probes—which no registered article whatever lacerates? Does no discordant note within me thrill responsive to mysterious watchwords, as "Revalenta Arabica" or "No. 1 St. Paul's Churchyard?" Then may I enjoy life and be happy.

Lifting up my eyes as I was musing to this effect, I beheld advancing toward me (I was then on Cornhill, near to the Royal Exchange) a solemn procession of three advertising vans of first-class dimensions, each drawn by a very little horse. As the cavalcade approached, I was at a loss to reconcile the careless deportment of the drivers of these vehicles with the terrific announcements they conducted through the city, which, being a summary of the contents of a Sunday newspaper, were of the most thrilling kind. Robbery, fire, murder, and the ruin of the United Kingdom—each discharged in a line by itself, like a separate broadside of red-hot shot—were among the least of the warnings addressed to an unthinking people. Yet the ministers of fate who drove the awful cars leaned forward with their arms upon their knees in a state of extreme lassitude, for want of any subject of interest. The first man, whose hair I might naturally have expected to see standing on end, scratched his head—one of the smoothest I ever beheld—with profound indifference. The second whistled. The third yawned.

Pausing to dwell upon this apathy, it appeared to me, as the fatal cars came by me, that I descried in the second car, through the portal in which the charioteer was seated, a figure stretched upon the floor. At the same time I thought I smelt tobacco. The latter impression passed quickly from me; the former remained. Curious to know whether this prostrate figure was the one impressible man of the whole capital who had been stricken insensible by the terrors revealed to him, and whose form had been placed in the car by the charioteer from motives of humanity, I followed the procession. It turned into Leadenhall Market and halted at a public-house. Each driver dismounted. I then distinctly heard, proceeding from the second car, where I had dimly seen the prostrate form, the words:

"And a pipe!"

The driver entering the public-house with his fellows, apparently for purposes of refreshment, I could not refrain from mounting on the shaft of the second vehicle and looking in at the portal. I then beheld, reclining on his back upon the floor, on a kind of mattress or divan, a little man in a shooting-coat. The exclamation "Dear me" which irresistibly escaped my lips caused him to sit upright and survey me. I found him to be a good-looking little man of about fifty, with a shining face, a tight head, a bright eye, a moist wink, a quick speech, and a ready air. He had something of a sporting way with him.

He looked at me and I looked at him until the driver displaced me by handing in a pint of beer, a pipe, and what I understand is called "a screw" of tobacco—an object which has the appearance of a curl-paper taken off the barmaid's head, with the curl in it.

"I beg your pardon," said I when the removed person of the driver again admitted of my presenting my face at the portal. "But—excuse my curiosity, which I inherit from my mother—do you live here?"

"That's good, too!" returned the little man, composedly laying aside a pipe he had smoked out and filling the pipe just brought to him.

"Oh, you don't live here, then?" said I.

He shook his head as he calmly lighted his pipe by means of a German tinder-box and replied: "This is my carriage. When things are flat I take a ride sometimes and enjoy myself. I am the inventor of these wans."

His pipe was now alight. He drank his beer all at once, and he smoked and he smiled at me.

"It was a great idea!" said I.

"Not so bad," returned the little man, with the modesty of merit.

"Might I be permitted to inscribe your name upon the tablets of my memory?" I asked.

"There's not much odds in the name," returned the little man, "no name particular—I am the king of the bill-stickers."

"Good gracious!" said I.

The monarch informed me with a smile that he had never been crowned or installed with any public ceremonies, but that he was peaceably acknowledged as king of the bill-stickers in right of being the oldest and most respected member of "the old school of bill-sticking." He likewise gave me to understand that there was a lord mayor of the bill-stickers, whose genius was chiefly exercised within the limits of the city. He made some allusion also to an inferior potentate called "Turkey Legs;" but I did not understand that this gentleman was invested with much power. I rather inferred that he derived his title from some peculiarity of gait, and that it was of an honorary character.

"My father," pursued the king of the bill-stickers, "was engineer, beadle, and bill-sticker to the parish of St. Andrew's, Holborn, in the year 1780. My father stuck bills at the time of the riots of London."

"You must be acquainted with the whole subject of bill-sticking from that time to the present!" said I.

"Pretty well so," was the answer.

"Excuse me," said I; "but I am a sort of a collector——"

"Not income tax?" cried his majesty, hastily removing his pipe from his lips.

"No, no," said I.

"Water rate?" said his majesty.

"No," replied I.

"Gas? assessed? sewers?" said his majesty.

"You misunderstand me," I replied soothingly. "Not that sort of collector at all; a collector of facts."

"Oh, if it's only facts," cried the king of the bill-stickers, recovering his good-humor and banishing the great mistrust that had suddenly fallen upon him, "come in and welcome! If it had been income, or winders, I think I should have pitched you out of the wan, upon my soul!"

Readily complying with the invitation, I squeezed myself in at the small aperture. His majesty, graciously handing me a little three-legged stood on which I took my seat in a corner, inquired if I smoked.

"I do—that is, I can," I answered.

"Pipe and a screw!" said his majesty to the attendant charioteer. "Do you prefer a dry smoke or do you moisten it?"

As unmitigated tobacco produces most disturbing effects upon my system (indeed, if I had perfect moral courage I doubt if I should smoke at all, under any circumstances), I advocated moisture, and begged the sovereign of the bill-stickers to name his usual liquor and to concede to me the privilege of paying for it. After some delicate reluctance on his part we were provided, through the instrumentality of the attendant charioteer, with a can of cold rum-and-water flavored with sugar and lemon. We were also furnished with a tumbler, and I was provided with a pipe. His majesty then observing that we might combine business with conversation, gave the word for the car to proceed; and to my great delight we jogged away at a foot pace.

I say to my great delight, because I am very fond of novelty, and it was a new sensation to be jolting through the tumult of the city in that secluded temple, partly open to the sky, surrounded by the roar without, and seeing nothing but the clouds. Occasionally blows from whips fell heavily on the temple's walls when by stopping up the road longer than usual we irritated carters and coachmen to madness; but they fell harmless upon us within and disturbed not the serenity of our peaceful retreat. As I looked upward I felt, I should imagine, like the astronomer royal. I was enchanted by the contrast between the freezing nature of our external mission on the blood of the populace and the perfect composure reigning within those sacred precincts: where his majesty, reclining easily on his left arm, smoked his pipe and drank his rum-and-water from his own side of the tumbler, which stood impartially between us. As I looked down from the clouds and caught his royal eye, he understood my reflections. "I have an idea," he observed, with an upward glance, "of training scarlet runners across in the season—making a arbor of it—and sometimes taking tea in the same, according to the song."

I nodded approval.

"And here you repose and think?" said I.

"And think," said he, "of posters—walls—and hoardings."

We were both silent, contemplating the vastness of the subject. I remembered a surprising fancy of dear Thomas Hood's, and wondered whether this monarch ever sighed to repair to the great wall of China and stick bills all over it.

"'And so," said he, rousing himself, "it's facts as you collect?"

"Facts," said I.

"The facts of bill-sticking," pursued his majesty in a benignant manner, "as known to myself, air as following. When my father was engineer, beadle, and bill-sticker to the parish of St. Andrew's, Holborn, he employed women to post bills for him. He employed women to post bills at the time of the riots of London. He died at the age of seventy-five year, and was buried by the murdered Eliza Grimwood, over in the Waterloo Road."

As this was somewhat in the nature of a royal speech, I listened with deference and silently. His majesty, taking a scroll from his pocket, proceeded, with great distinctness, to pour out the following flood of information:

"'The bills being at that period mostly proclamations and declarations, and which were only a demy size, the manner of posting the bills (as they did not use brushes) was by means of a piece of wood which they called a "dabber." Thus things continued till such time as the State lottery was passed, and then the printers began to print larger bills, and men were employed instead of women, as the State lottery commissioners then began to send men all over England to post bills, and would keep them out for six or eight months at a time, and they were called by the London bill-stickers "trampers," their wages at the time being 10 shillings per day besides expenses. They used sometimes to be stationed in large towns for five or six months together, distributing the schemes to all the houses in the town. And then there were more caricature wood-block engravings for posting-bills than there are at the present time, the principal printers at that time of posting-bills being Messrs. Evans & Ruffy, of Budge Row; Thoroughgood & Whiting, of the present day; and Messrs. Gye & Balne, Gracechurch Street, City. The largest bills printed at that period were a two-sheet double crown; and when they commenced printing four-sheet bills two bill-stickers would work together. They had no settled wages per week, but had a fixed price for their work, and the London bill-stickers, during a lottery week, have been known to earn each £8 or £9 per week till the day of drawing; likewise the men who carried boards in the street used to have £1 per week, and the bill-stickers at that time would not allow any one to willfully cover or destroy their bills, as they had a society among themselves, and very frequently dined together at some public-house where they used to go of an evening to have their work delivered out untoe 'em.'"

All this his majesty delivered in a gallant manner; posting it, as it were, before me, in a great proclamation. I took advantage of the pause he now made to inquire what a "two-sheet double crown" might express.

"A two-sheet double crown," replied the king, "is a bill thirty-nine inches wide by thirty inches high."

"Is it possible," said I, my mind reverting to the gigantic admonitions we were then displaying to the multitude—which were as infants to some of the posting-bills on the rotten old warehouse—"that some few years ago the largest bill was no larger than that?"

"The fact," returned the king, "is undoubtedly so." Here he instantly rushed again into the scroll.

"'Since the abolishing of the State Lottery all that good feeling has gone, and nothing but jealousy exists, through the rivalry of each other. Several bill-sticking companies have started, but have failed. The first party that started a company was twelve years ago; but what was left of the old school and their dependants joined together and opposed them. And for some time we were quiet again, till a printer of Hatton Garden formed a company by hiring the sides of houses; but he was not supported by the public, and he left his wooden frames fixed up for rent. The last company that started took advantage of the new police act, and hired of Messrs. Grissell & Peto the hoarding of Trafalgar Square, and established a bill-sticking office on Cursitor Street, Chancery Lane, and engaged some of the new bill-stickers to do their work, and for a time got the half of all our work, and with such spirit did they carry on their opposition toward us that they used to give us in charge before the magistrate and get us fined; but they found it so expensive that they could not keep it up, for they were always employing a lot of ruffians from the Seven Dials to come and fight us; and on one occasion the old bill-stickers went to Trafalgar Square to attempt to post bills, when they were given in custody by the watchman in their employ and fined at Queen Square £5, as they would not allow any of us to speak in the office; but when they were gone we had an interview with the magistrate, who mitigated the fine to 15 shillings. During the time the men were waiting for the fine this company started off to a public-house that we were in the habit of using, and waited for us coming back, where a fighting scene took place that beggars description. Shortly after this the principal one day came and shook hands with us, and acknowledged that he had broken up the company, and that he himself had lost £500 in trying to overthrow us. We then took possession of the hoarding in Trafalgar Square; but Messrs. Grissell & Peto would not allow us to post our bills on the said hoarding without paying them —and from first to last we paid upward of £200 for that hoarding, and likewise the hoarding of the Reform Club-house, Pall Mall.'"

His majesty, being now completely out of breath, laid down his scroll (which he appeared to have finished), puffed at his pipe, and took some rum-and-water. I embraced the opportunity of asking how many divisions the art and mystery of bill-sticking comprised. He replied three—auctioneers' bill-sticking, theatrical bill-sticking, general bill-sticking.

"The auctioneers' porters," said the king, "who do their bill-sticking, are mostly respectable and intelligent, and generally well paid for their work, whether in town or country. The price paid by the principal auctioneers for country work is 9 shillings per day, that is, 7 shillings for day's work, 1 shilling for lodging, and 1 for paste. Town work is 5 shillings a day, including paste."

"Town work must be rather hot work," said I, "if there be many of those fighting scenes that beggar description among the bill-stickers."

"Well," replied the king, "I ain't a stranger, I assure you, to black eyes; a bill-sticker ought to know how to handle his fists a bit. As to that row I have mentioned, that grew out of competition, conducted in an uncompromising spirit. Besides a man in a horse-and-shay continually following us about, the company had a watchman on duty, night and day, to prevent us sticking bills upon the hoarding in Trafalgar Square. We went there early one morning to stick bills and to black-wash their bills if we were interfered with. We were interfered with, and I gave the word for laying on the wash. It was laid on—pretty brisk—and we were all taken to Queen Square: but they couldn't fine me. I knew that"—with a bright smile—"I'd only give directions—I was only the general."

Charmed with this monarch's affability, I inquired if he had ever hired a hoarding himself.

"Hired a large one," he replied, "opposite the Lyceum Theater, when the buildings was there. Paid £30 for it; let out places on it and called it 'The External Paper Hanging Station.' But it didn't answer. Ah!" said his majesty thoughtfully as he filled the glass, "bill-stickers have a deal to contend with. The bill-sticking clause was got into the police act by a member of Parliament that employed me at his election. The clause is pretty stiff respecting where bills go; but he didn't mind where his bills went. It was all right enough so long as they was his bills!"

Fearful that I observed a shadow of misanthropy on the king's cheerful face, I asked whose ingenious invention that was, which I greatly admired, of sticking bills under the arches of the bridges.

"Mine!" said his majesty. "I was the first that ever stuck a bill under a bridge.! Imitators soon rose up, of course. When don't they? But they stuck 'em at low water, and the tide came and swept the bills clean away. I knew that!" The king laughed.

"What may be the name of that instrument, like an immense fishing-rod," I inquired, "with which bills are posted on high places?"

"The joints," returned his majesty. "Now we use the joints where formerly we used ladders—as they do still in country places. Once, when Madam" (Vestris, understood) "was playing in Liverpool, another bill-sticker and me were at it together on the wall outside the Clarence Dock—me with the joints—him on a ladder. Lord! I had my bill up, right over his head, yards above him, ladder and all, while he was crawling to his work. The people going in and out of the docks stood and laughed! It's about thirty years since the joints come in."

"Are there any bill-stickers who can't read?" I took the liberty of inquiring.

"Some," said the king. "But they know which is the right side upward of their work. They keep it as it's given out to 'em. I have seen a bill or so stuck wrong side upward. But it's very rare."

Our discourse sustained some interruption at this point by the procession of cars occasioning a stoppage of about three-quarters of a mile in length, as nearly as I could judge. His majesty, however, entreating me not to be discomposed by the contingent uproar, smoked with great placidity and surveyed the firmament.

When we were again in motion, I begged to be informed what was the largest poster his majesty had ever seen. The king replied: "A thirty-six-sheet poster." I gathered, also, that there were about a hundred and fifty bill-stickers in London, and that his majesty considered an average hand equal to the posting of one hundred bills (single sheets) in a day. The king was of opinion that although posters had much increased in size, they had not increased in number, as the abolition of the State lotteries had occasioned a great falling off, especially in the country. Over and above which change, I bethought myself that the custom of advertising in newspapers had greatly increased. The completion of many London improvements, as Trafalgar Square (I particularly observed the singularity of his majesty's calling that an improvement), the Royal Exchange, etc., had of late years reduced the number of advantageous posting-places. Bill-stickers at present rather confine themselves to districts than to particular descriptions of work. One man would strike over Whitechapel, another would take round Houndsditch, Shoreditch, and the City Road; one (the king said) would stick to the Surrey side; another would make a beat of the West End.

His majesty remarked with some approach to severity on the neglect of delicacy and taste gradually introduced into the trade by the new school; a profligate and inferior race of impostors who took jobs at almost any price, to the detriment of the old school and the confuson of their own misguided employers. He considered that the trade was overdone with competition, and observed, speaking of his subjects: "There are too many of 'em." He believed, still, that things were a little better than they had been; adducing as a proof the fact that particular posting-places were now reserved by common consent for particular posters; those places, however, must be regularly occupied by those posters, or they lapsed and fell into other hands. It was of no use giving a man a Drury Lane bill this week and not next. Where was it to go? He was of opinion that going to the expense of putting up your own board on which your sticker could display your own bills was the only complete way of posting yourself at the present time; but even to effect this, on payment of a shilling a week to the keepers of steamboat piers and other such places, you must be able, besides, to give orders for theaters and public exhibitions, or you would be sure to be cut out by somebody. His majesty regarded the passion for orders as one of the most unappeasable appetites of human nature. If there were a building, or if there were repairs going on anywhere, you could generally stand something and make it right with the foreman of the works; but orders would be expected from you, and the man who could give the most orders was the man who would come off best. There was this other objectionable point in orders, that workmen sold them for drink, and often sold them to persons who were likewise troubled with the weakness of thirst: which led (his majesty said) to the presentation of your orders at theater doors by individuals who were "too shakery" to derive intellectual profit from the entertainments, and who brought a scandal on you. Finally, his majesty said that you could hardly put too little in a poster; what you wanted was two or three good catch-lines for the eye to rest on—then leave it alone—and there you were!

These are the minutes of my conversation with his majesty as I noted them down shortly afterward. I am not aware that I have been betrayed into any alteration or suppression. The manner of the king was frank in the extreme; and he seemed to me to avoid at once that slight tendency to repetition which may have been observed in the conversation of his majesty King George the Third, and that slight undercurrent of egotism which the curious observer may perhaps detect in the conversation of Napoleon Bonaparte.

I must do the king justice to say that it was I, and not he, who closed the dialogue. At this juncture I became the subject of a remarkable optical delusion; the legs of my stool appeared to me to double up; the car to spin round and round with great violence; and a mist to arise between myself and his majesty. In addition to these sensations, I felt extremely unwell. I refer these unpleasant effects either to the paste with which the posters were affixed to the van, which may have contained some small portion of arsensic, or to the printer's ink, which may have contained some equally deleterious ingredient. Of this I cannot be sure. I am only sure that I was not affected either by the smoke or the rum-and-water. I was assisted out of the vehicle in a state of mind which I have only experienced in two other places—I allude to the pier at Dover and to the corresponding portion of the town of Calais—and sat upon a door-step until I recovered. The procession had then disappeared. I have since looked anxiously for the king in several other cars, but I have not yet had the happiness of seeing his majesty.

"BIRTHS: MRS. MEEK OF A SON."

My name is Meek. I am, in fact, Mr. Meek. That son is mine and Mrs. Meek's. When I saw the announcement in the *Times* I dropped the paper. I had put it in myself and paid for it, but it looked so noble that it overpowered me.

As soon as I could compose my feelings I took the paper up to Mrs. Meek's bedside. "Maria Jane," said I (I allude to Mrs. Meek), "you are now a public character." We read the review of our child several times with feelings of the strongest emotion; and I sent the boy who cleans the boots and shoes to the office for fifteen copies. No reduction was made on taking that quantity.

It is scarcely necessary for me to say that our child had been expected. In fact, it had been expected with comparative confidence for some months. Mrs. Meek's mother, who resides with us—of the name of Bigby—had made every preparation for its admission to our circle.

I hope and believe I am a quiet man. I will go further.

I know I am a quiet man. My constitution is tremulous, my voice was never loud, and in point of stature I have been from infancy small. I have the greatest respect for Maria Jane's mamma. She is a most remarkable woman. I honor Maria Jane's mamma. In my opinion she would storm a town single-handed with a hearth-broom and carry it. I have never known her to yield any point whatever to mortal man. She is calculated to terrify the stoutest heart.

Still—but I will not anticipate.

The first intimation I had of any preparations being in progress on the part of Maria Jane's mamma was one afternoon several months ago. I came home earlier than usual from the office, and proceeding into the dining-room found an obstruction behind the door which prevented it from opening freely. It was an obstruction of a soft nature. On looking in I found it to be a female.

The female in question stood in the corner behind the door consuming sherry wine. From the nutty smell of that beverage pervading the apartment, I have no doubt she was consuming a second glassful. She wore a black bonnet of large dimensions and was copious in figure. The expression of her countenance was severe and discontented. The words to which she gave utterance on seeing me were these: "Oh, git along with you, sir, if you please; me and Mrs. Bigby don't want no male parties here!"

That female was Mrs. Prodgit.

I immediately withdrew, of course. I was rather hurt, but I made no remark. Whether it was that I showed a lowness of spirits after dinner in consequence of feeling that I seemed to intrude, I cannot say. But Maria Jane's mamma said to me on her retiring for the night in a low, distinct voice, and with a look of reproach that completely subdued me: "George Meek, Mrs. Prodgit is your wife's nurse!"

I bear no ill-will toward Mrs. Prodgit. Is it likely that I, writing this with tears in my eyes, should be capable of deliberate animosity toward a female so essential to the welfare of Maria Jane? I am willing to admit that Fate may have been to blame and not Mrs. Prodgit, but it is undeniably true that the latter female brought desolation and devastation into my lowly dwelling.

We were happy after her first appearance; we were sometimes exceedingly so. But whenever the parlor door was opened and "Mrs. Prodgit!" announced (and she was very often announced) misery ensued. I could not bear Mrs. Prodgit's look. I felt that I was far from wanted and had no business to exist in Mrs. Prodgit's presence. Between Maria Jane's mamma and Mrs. Prodgit there was a dreadful secret understanding—a dark mystery and conspiracy, pointing me out as a being to be shunned. I appeared to have done something that was evil. Whenever Mrs. Prodgit called after dinner I retired to my dressing-room—where the temperature is very low indeed in the wintry time of the year—and sat looking at my frosty breath as it rose before me and at my rack of boots; a serviceable article of furniture, but never, in my opinion, an exhilarating object.

The length of the councils that were held with Mrs. Prodgit under these circumstances I will not attempt to describe. I will merely remark that Mrs. Prodgit always consumed sherry wine while the deliberations were in progress; that they always ended in Maria Jane's being in wretched spirits on the sofa; and that Maria Jane's mamma always received me when I was recalled with a look of desolate triumph that too plainly said: "Now, George Meek! You see my child, Maria Jane, a ruin, and I hope you are satisfied!"

I pass, generally, over the period that intervened between the day when Mrs. Prodgit entered her protest against male parties and the ever-memorable midnight when I brought her to my unobtrusive home in a cab with an extremely large box on the roof, and a bundle, a bandbox, and a basket between the driver's legs. I have no objection to Mrs. Prodgit (aided and abetted by Mrs. Bigby, who I never can forget is the parent of Maria Jane) taking entire possession of my unassuming establishment. In the recesses of my own breast the thought may linger that a man in possession cannot be so dreadful as a woman, and that woman Mrs. Prodgit; but I ought to bear a good deal, and I hope I can and do. Huffing and snubbing prey upon my feelings, but I can bear them without complaint. They may tell in the long run; I may be hustled about from post to pillar beyond my strength; nevertheless I wish to avoid giving rise to words in the family.

The voice of nature, however, cries aloud in behalf of Augustus George, my infant son. It is for him that I wish to utter a few plaintive household words. I am not at all angry; I am mild—but miserable.

I wish to know why, when my child, Augustus George, was expected in our circle, a provision of pins was made, as if the little stranger were a criminal who was to be put to the torture immediately on his arrival instead of a holy babe? I wish to know why haste was made to stick those pins all over his innocent form in every direction? I wish to be informed why light and air are excluded from Augustus George like poisons? Why, I ask, is my unoffending infant so hedged into a basket-bedstead, with dimity and calico, with miniature sheets and blankets, that I can only hear him snuffle (and no wonder!) deep down under the pink hood of a little bathing-machine, and can never peruse even so much of his lineaments as his nose?

Was I expected to be the father of a French roll, that the brushes of all nations were laid in, to rasp Augustus George? Am I to be told that his sensitive skin was ever intended by nature to have rashes brought out upon it by the premature and incessant use of those formidable little instruments?

Is my son a nutmeg, that he is to be grated on the stiff edges of sharp frills? Am I the parent of a muslin boy, that his yielding surface is to be crimped and small plaited? Or is my child composed of paper or of linen, that impressions of the finer getting-up art practiced by the laundress are to be printed off all over his soft arms and legs as I constantly observe them? The starch enters his soul; who can wonder that he cries?

Was Augustus George intended to have limbs or to be born a torso? I presume that limbs were the intention, as they are the usual practice. Then why are my poor child's limbs fettered and tied up? Am I to be told that there is any analogy between Augustus George Meek and Jack Sheppard?

Analyze castor oil at any institution of chemistry that may be agreed upon, and inform me what resemblance in taste it bears to that natural provision which it is at once the pride and duty of Maria Jane to administer to Augustus George! Yet I charge Mrs. Prodgit (aided and abetted by Mrs. Bigby) with systematically forcing castor oil on my innocent son from the first hour of his birth. When that medicine in its efficient action causes internal disturbance to Augustus George, I charge Mrs. Prodgit (aided and abetted by Mrs. Bigby) with insanely and inconsistently administering opium to allay the storm she has raised. What is the meaning of this?

If the days of Egyptian mummies are past, how dare Mrs. Prodgit require for the use of my son an amount of flannel and linen that would carpet my humble roof? Do I wonder that she requires it? No! This morning, within an hour, I beheld this agonizing sight. I beheld my son—Augustus George—in Mrs. Prodgit's hands and on Mrs. Prodgit's knee being dressed. He was at the moment, comparatively speaking, in a state of nature, having nothing on but an extremely short shirt, remarkably disproportionate to the length of his usual outer garments. Trailing from Mrs. Prodgit's lap, on the floor, was a long narrow roller or bandage—I should say of several yards in extent. In this I saw Mrs. Prodgit tightly roll the body of my unoffending infant, turning him over and over, now presenting his unconscious face upward, now the back of his bald head, until the unnatural feat was accomplished and the bandage secured by a pin, which I have every reason to believe entered the body of my only child. In this tourniquet he passes the present phase of his existence. Can I know it and smile?

I fear I have been betrayed into expressing myself warmly, but I feel deeply. Not for myself, for Augustus George. I dare not interfere. Will any one? Will any publication? Any doctor? Any parent? Anybody? I do not complain that Mrs. Prodgit (aided and abetted by Mrs. Bigby) entirely alienates Maria Jane's affections from me and interposes an impassable barrier between us. I do not complain of being made of no account. I do not want to be of any account. But Augustus George is a production of nature (I cannot think otherwise), and I claim that he should be treated with some remote reference to nature. In my opinion, Mrs. Prodgit is, from first to last, a convention and a superstition. Are all the faculty afraid of Mrs. Prodgit? If not, why don't they take her in hand and improve her?

P. S.—Maria Jane's mamma boasts of her own knowledge of the subject, and says she brought up seven children besides Maria Jane. But how do I know that she might not have brought them up much better? Maria Jane herself is far from strong and is subject to headaches and nervous indigestion. Besides which I learn from the statistical tables that one child in five dies within the first year of its life and one child in three within the fifth. That don't look as if we could never improve in these particulars, I think!

P. P. S.—Augustus George is in convulsions.

LYING AWAKE.

"My uncle lay with his eyes half-closed and his nightcap drawn almost down to his nose. His fancy was already wandering, and began to mingle up the present scene with the crater of Vesuvius, the French Opera, the Coliseum at Rome, Dolly's Chop House in London, and all the farrago of noted places with which the brain of a traveler is crammed; in a word, he was just falling asleep."

Thus that delightful writer, Washington Irving, in his "Tales of a Traveler." But it happened to me the other night to be lying, not with my eyes half-closed, but with my eyes wide open; not with my nightcap drawn almost down to my nose, for on sanitary principles I never wear a nightcap; but with my hair pitchforked and touzled all over the pillow; not just falling asleep by any means, but glaringly, persistently, and obstinately broad awake. Perhaps with no scientific intention or invention, I was illustrating the theory of the duality of the brain; perhaps one part of my brain being wakeful sat up to watch the other part, which was sleepy. Be that as it may, something in me was as desirous to go to sleep as it possibly could be, but something else in me would not go to sleep and was obstinate as George the Third.

Thinking of George the Third—for I devote this paper to my train of thoughts as I lay awake: most people lying awake sometimes and having some interest in the subject—put me in mind of Benjamin Franklin, and so Benjamin Franklin's paper on the art of procuring pleasant dreams, which would seem necessarily to include the art of going to sleep, came into my head. Now, as I often used to read that paper when I was a very small boy, and as I recollect everything I read then as perfectly as I forget everything I read now, I quoted, "Get out of bed, beat up and turn your pillow, shake the bedclothes well with at least twenty shakes, then throw the bed open and leave it to cool; in the mean while, continuing undressed, walk about your chamber. When you begin to feel the cold air unpleasant, then return to your bed and you will soon fall asleep, and your sleep will be sweet and pleasant." Not a bit of it! I performed the whole ceremony, and if it were possible for me to be more saucer-eyed than I was before, that was the only result that came of it.

Except Niagara. The two quotations from Washington Irving and Benjamin Franklin may have put it in my head by an American association of ideas; but there I was, and the Horseshoe Fall was thundering and tumbling in my eyes and ears, and the very rainbows that I left upon the spray when I really did last look upon it were beautiful to see. The night-light being quite as plain, however, and sleep seeming to be many thousand miles further off than Niagara, I made up my mind to think a little about sleep; which I no sooner did than I whirled off in spite of myself to Drury Lane Theater, and there saw a great actor and dear friend of mine (whom I had been thinking of in the day) playing *Macbeth*, and heard him apostrophizing "the death of each day's life," as I have heard him many a time in the days that are gone.

But sleep. I will think about sleep. I am determined to think (this is the way I went on) about sleep. I must hold the word sleep tight and fast, or I shall be off at a tangent in half a second. I feel myself unaccountably straying already into Clare Market. Sleep. It would be curious as illustrating the equality of sleep to inquire how many of its phenomena are common to all classes, to all degrees of wealth and poverty, to every grade of education and ignorance. Here, for example, is her majesty Queen Victoria in her palace this present blessed night, and here is Winking Charley, a sturdy vagrant, in one of her majesty's jails. Her majesty has fallen many thousands of times from that same tower which I claim a right to tumble off now and then. So has Winking Charley. Her majesty, in her sleep, has opened her prorogued Parliament, or has held a drawing room, attired in some very scanty dress, the deficiencies and improprieties of which have caused her great uneasiness. I, in my degree, have suffered unspeakble agitation of mind from taking the chair at a public dinner at the London Tavern in my night-clothes, which not all the courtesy of my kind friend and host Mr. Bathe could persuade me were quite adapted to the occasion. Winking Charley has been repeatedly tried in a worse condition. Her majesty is no stranger to a vault or firmament, of a sort of floorcloth, with an indistinct pattern, distantly resembling eyes, which occasionally obtrudes itself on her repose. Neither am I. Neither is Winking Charley. It is quite common to all three of us to skim along with airy strides a little above the ground; also to hold with the deepest interest dialogues with various people, all represented by ourselves, and to be at our wits' end to know what they are going to tell us; and to be indescribably astonished by the secrets they disclose. It is probable that we have all three committed murders and hidden bodies. It is pretty certain that we have all desperately wanted to cry out and have had no voice; that we have all gone to the play and not been able to get in; that we have all dreamed much more of our youth than of our later lives; that—I have lost it! The thread's broken.

And up I go. I, lying here with the night-light before me, up I go, for no reason on earth that I can find out, and drawn by no links that are visible to me, up the great St. Bernard! I have lived in Switzerland and rambled among the mountains; but why I should go there now, and why up the great St. Bernard in preference to any other mountain, I have no idea. As I lie here broad awake and with every sense so sharpened that I can distinctly hear distant noises inaudible to me at another time, I make that journey, as I really did on the same summer day, with the same happy party—ah! two since dead, I grieve to think—and there is the same track, with the same black wooden arms to point the way, and there are the same storm-refuges here and there; and there is the same snow falling at the top, and there are the same frosty mists, and there is the same intensely cold convent with its menagerie smell, and the same breed of dogs fast dying out, and the same breed of jolly young monks whom I mourn to know as humbugs, and the same convent parlor with its piano and the sitting round the fire, and the same supper, and the same lone night in a cell, and the same bright, fresh morning, when going out into the highly rarefied air was like a plunge into an icy bath. Now see here what comes along; and why does this thing stalk into my mind on the top of a Swiss mountain?

It is a figure that I once saw just after dark chalked upon a door in a little back lane near a country church—my first church. How young a child I may have been at the time I don't know, but it horrified me so intensely—in connection with the churchyard, I suppose, for it smokes a pipe and has a big hat with each of its ears sticking out in a horizontal line under the brim, and is not in itself more oppressive than a mouth from ear to ear, a pair of goggle eyes, and hands like two bunches of carrots, five in each, can make it—that it is still vaguely alarming to me to recall (as I have often done before, lying awake) the running home, the looking behind, the horror of its following me; though whether disconnected from the door, or door and all, I can't say and perhaps never could. It lays a disagreeable train. I must resolve to think of something on the voluntary principle.

The balloon ascents of this last season. They will do to think about while I lie awake as well as anything else. I must hold them tight, though, for I feel them sliding away, and in their stead are the Mannings, husband and wife, hanging on the top of Horsemonger Lane Jail. In connection with which dismal spectacle I recall this curious fantasy of the mind. That having beheld that execution, and having left those two forms dangling on the top of the entrance gateway—the man's, a limp, loose suit of clothes, as if the man had gone out of them; the woman's, a fine shape, so elaborately corseted and artfully dressed that it was quite unchanged in its trim appearance as it slowly swung from side to side—I never could, by my uttermost efforts, for some weeks, present the outside of that prison to myself (which the terrible impression I had received continually obliged me to do) without presenting it with the two figures still hanging in the morning air. Until, strolling past the gloomy place one night, when the street was deserted and quiet, and actually seeing that the bodies were not there, my fancy was persuaded, as it were, to take them down and bury them within the precincts of the jail, where they have lain ever since.

The balloon ascents of last season. Let me reckon them up. There were the horse, the bull, the parachute and the tumbler hanging on—chiefly by his toes, I believe—below the car. Very wrong, indeed, and decidedly to be stopped. But in connection with these and similar dangerous exhibitions, it strikes me that that portion of the public whom they entertain is unjustly reproached. Their pleasure is in the difficulty overcome. They are a public of great faith, and are quite confident that the gentleman will not fall off the horse or the lady off the bull or out of the parachute, and that the tumbler has a firm hold with his toes. They do not go to see the adventurer vanquished, but triumphant. There is no parallel in public combats between men and beasts, because nobody can answer for the particular beast—unless it were always the same beast, in which case it would be a mere stage show, which the same public would go in the same state of mind to see, entirely believing in the brute being beforehand safely subdued by the man. That they are not accustomed to calculate hazards and dangers with any nicety, we may know from their rash exposure of themselves in overcrowded steamboats and unsafe conveyances and places of all kinds. And I cannot help thinking that instead of railing and attributing savage motives to a people naturally well disposed and humane, it is better to teach them and lead them argumentatively and reasonably—for they are very reasonable if you will discuss a matter with them—to more considerate and wise conclusions.

This is a disagreeable intrusion! Here is a man with his throat cut dashing toward me as I lie awake. A recollection of an old story of a kinsman of mine, who going home one foggy winter night to Hampstead, when London was much smaller and the road lonesome, suddenly encountered such a figure rushing past him, and presently two keepers from a madhouse in pursuit. A very unpleasant creature indeed to come into my mind unbidden as I lie awake.

The balloon ascents of last season. I must return to the balloons. Why did the bleeding man start out of them? Never mind; if I inquire he will be back again. The balloons. This particular public have inherently a great pleasure in the contemplation of physical difficulties overcome; mainly, as I take it, because the lives of a large majority of them are exceedingly monotonous and real, and further are a struggle against continual difficulties, and further still, because anything in the form of accidental injury or any kind of illness or disability is so very serious in their own sphere. I will explain this seeming paradox of mine. Take the case of a Christmas pantomime. Surely nobody supposes that the young mother in the pit who falls into fits of laughter when the baby is boiled or sat upon would be at all diverted by such an occurrence off the stage. Nor is the decent workman in the gallery, who is transported beyond the ignorant present by the delight with which he sees a stout gentleman pushed out of a two pair of stairs window, to be slandered by the suspicion that he would be in the least entertained by such a spectacle in any street in London, Paris, or New York. It always appears to me that the secret of this enjoyment lies in the temporary superiority to the common hazards and mischances of life; in seeing casualties, attended when they really occur with bodily and mental suffering, tears, and poverty, happen through a very rough sort of poetry without the least harm being done to any one—the pretense of distress in a pantomime being so broadly humorous as to be no pretense at all. Much as in the comic fiction I can understand the mother with a very vulnerable baby at home greatly relishing the invulnerable baby on the stage, so in the Cremorne reality I can understand the mason who is always liable to fall off a scaffold in his working jacket and to be carried to the hospital, having an infinite admiration of the radiant personage in spangles who goes into the clouds upon a bull or upside down, and who he takes it for granted—not reflecting upon the thing—has by uncommon skill and dexterity conquered such mischances as those to which he and his acquaintance are continually exposed.

I wish the morgue in Paris would not come here as I lie awake, with its ghastly beds, and the swollen saturated clothes hanging up, and the water dripping, dripping all day long upon that other swollen saturated something in the corner, like a heap of crushed over-ripe figs that I have seen in Italy! And this detestable morgue comes back again at the head of a procession of forgotten ghost-stories. This will never do. I must think of something else as I lie awake, or like that sagacious animal in the United States who recognized the colonel who was such a dead shot, I am a gone 'coon. What shall I think of? The late brutal assaults. Very good subject. The late brutal assaults.

(Though whether supposing I should see here before me as I lie awake the awfull phantom described in one of those ghost-stories, who with a head-dress or shroud was always seen looking in through a certain glass door at a certain dead hour—whether in such a case it would be the least consolation to me to know on philosophical grounds that it was merely my imagination, is a question I can't help asking myself by the way.)

The late brutal assaults. I strongly question the expediency of advocating the revival of whipping for those crimes. It is a natural and generous impulse to be indignant at the perpetration of inconceivable brutality, but I doubt the whipping panacea gravely. Not in the least regard or pity for the criminal, whom I hold in far lower estimation than a mad wolf, but in consideration for the general tone and feeling, which is very much improved since the whipping times. It is bad for a people to be familiarized with such punishments. When the whip went out of Bridewell and ceased to be flourished at the cart's tail and at the whipping-post, it began to fade out of madhouses, and workhouses, and schools, and families, and to give place to a better system everywhere than cruel driving. It would be hasty because a few brutes may be inadequately punished to revive in any aspect what in so many aspects society is hardly yet happily rid of. The whip is a very contagious kind of thing and difficult to confine within one set of bounds. Utterly abolish punishment by fine—a barbarous device, quite as much out of date as wager by battle, but particularly connected in the vulgar mind with this class of offense—at least quadruple the term of imprisonment for aggravated assaults—and above all let us in such cases have no pet prisoning, vain glorifying, strong soup, and roasted meats, but hard work and one unchanging and uncompromising dietary of bread and water, well or ill; and we shall do much better than by going down into the dark to grope for the whip among the rusty fragments of the rack, and the branding-iron, and the chains and gibbet from the public roads, and the weights that pressed men to death in the cells of Newgate.

I had proceeded thus far when I found I had been lying awake so long that the very dead began to wake too and to crowd into my thoughts most sorrowfully. Therefore I resolved to lie awake no more, but to get up and go out for a night walk—which resolution was an acceptable relief to me, as I dare say it may prove now to a great many more.

THE POOR RELATION'S STORY.

He was very reluctant to take precedence of so many respected members of the family by beginning the round of stories they were to relate as they sat in a goodly circle by the Christmas fire; and he modestly suggested that it would be more correct if "John, our esteemed host" (whose health he begged to drink), would have the kindness to begin. For as to himself, he said, he was so little used to lead the way that really— But as they all cried out here that he must begin, and agreed with one voice that he might, could, would, and should begin, he left off rubbing his hands and took his legs out from under his arm-chair and did begin.

I have no doubt (said the poor relation) that I shall surprise the assembled members of our family, and particularly John, our esteemed host, to whom we are so much indebted for the great hospitality with which he has this day entertained us, by the confession I am going to make. But if you do me the honor to be surprised at anything that falls from a person so unimportant in the family as I am, I can only say that I shall be scrupulously accurate in all I relate.

I am not what I am supposed to be. I am quite another thing. Perhaps before I go further I had better glance at what I am supposed to be.

It is supposed, unless I mistake—the assembled members of our family will correct me if I do, which is very likely (here the poor relation looked mildly about him for contradiction)—that I am nobody's enemy but my own. That I never met with any particular success in anything. That I failed in business because I was unbusiness-like and credulous—in not being prepared for the interested designs of my partner. That I failed in love because I was ridiculously trustful—in thinking it impossible that Christiana could deceive me. That I failed in my expectations from my Uncle Chill on account of not being as sharp as he could have wished in worldly matters. That through life I have been rather put upon and disappointed in a general way. That I am at present a bachelor of between fifty-nine and sixty years of age, living on a limited income in the form of a quarterly allowance, to which I see that John, our esteemed host, wishes me to make no further allusion.

The supposition as to my present pursuits and habits is to the following effect.

I live in a lodging in the Clapham Road—a very clean back room in a very respectable house—where I am expected not to be at home in the daytime unless poorly, and which I usually leave in the morning at nine o'clock on pretense of going to business. I take my breakfast—my roll and butter and my half-pint of coffee—at the old-established coffee-shop near Westminster Bridge, and then I go into the City—I don't know why—and sit in Garraway's Coffee House and on 'change and walk about and look into a few offices and counting-houses where some of my relations or acquaintance are so good as to tolerate me, and where I stand by the fire if the weather happens to be cold. I get through the day in this way until five o'clock and then I dine, at a cost on the average of one and threepence. Having still a little money to spend on my evening's entertainment, I look into the old-established coffee-shop as I go home and take my cup of tea and perhaps my bit of toast. So as the large hand of the clock makes its way round to the morning hour again, I make my way round to the Clapham Road again, and go to bed when I get to my lodging—fire being expensive and being objected to by the family on account of its giving trouble and making a dirt.

Sometimes one of my relations or acquaintances is so obliging as to ask me to dinner. Those are holiday occasions and then I generally walk in the park. I am a solitary man and seldom walk with anybody. Not that I am avoided because I am shabby; for I am not at all shabby, having always a very good suit of black on (or rather Oxford mixture, which has the appearance of black and wears much better), but I have got into a habit of speaking low and being rather silent, and my spirits are not high, and I am sensible that I am not an attractive companion.

The only exception to this general rule is the child of my first cousin, little Frank. I have a particular affection for that child and he takes very kindly to me. He is a diffident boy by nature, and in a crowd he is soon run over, as I may say, and forgotten. He and I, however, get on exceedingly well. I have a fancy that the poor child will in time succeed to my peculiar position in the family. We talk but little; still we understand each other. We walk about hand in hand, and without much speaking he knows what I mean and I know what he means. When he was very little indeed I used to take him to the windows of the toy-shops and show him the toys inside. It is surprising how soon he found out that I would have made him a great many presents if I had been in circumstances to do it.

Little Frank and I go and look at the outside of the monument—he is very fond of the monument—and at the bridges and at all the sights that are free. On two of my birthdays we have dined on *à la mode* beef and gone at half-price to the play and been deeply interested. I was once walking with him in Lombard Street, which we often visit on account of my having mentioned to him that there are great riches there—he is very fond of Lombard Street—when a gentleman said to me as he passed by: "Sir, your little son has dropped his glove." I assure you, if you will excuse my remarking on so trivial a circumstance, this accidental mention of the child as mine quite touched my heart and brought the foolish tears into my eyes.

When little Frank is sent to school in the country I shall be very much at a loss what to do with myself, but I have the intention of walking down there once a month and seeing him on a half-holiday. I am told he will then be at play upon the heath; and if my visits should be objected to as unsettling the child, I can see him from a distance without his seeing me and walk back again. His mother comes of a highly genteel family and rather disapproves, I am aware, of our being too much together. I know that I am not calculated to improve his retiring disposition, but I think he would miss me beyond the feeling of the moment if we were wholly separated.

When I die in the Clapham Road I shall not leave much more in this world than I shall take out of it; but I happen to have a miniature of a bright-faced boy with a curling head and an open shirt-frill waving down his bosom (my mother had it taken for me, but I can't believe that it was ever like), which will be worth nothing to sell and which I shall beg may be given to Frank. I have written my dear boy a little letter with it, in which I have told him that I felt very sorry to part from him, though bound to confess that I knew no reason why I should remain here. I have given him some short advice, the best in my power, to take warning of the consequences of being nobody's enemy but his own; and I have endeavored to comfort him for what I fear he will consider a bereavement by pointing out to him that I was only a superfluous something to every one but him, and that having by some means failed to find a place in this great assembly I am better out of it.

Such (said the poor relation, clearing his throat and beginning to speak a little louder) is the general impression about me. Now, it is a remarkable circumstance which forms the aim and purpose of my story that this is all wrong. This is not my life and these are not my habits. I do not even live in the Clapham Road. Comparatively speaking I am very seldom there. I reside mostly in a—I am almost ashamed to say the word, it sounds so full of pretension—in a castle. I do not mean that it is an old baronial habitation, but still it is a building always known to every one by the name of a castle. In it I preserve the particulars of my history; they run thus:

It was when I first took John Spatter (who had been my clerk) into partnership, and when I was still a young man of not more than twenty-five, residing in the house of my Uncle Chill, from whom I had considerable expectations, that I ventured to propose to Christiana. I had loved Christiana a long time. She was very beautiful and very winning in all respects. I rather mistrusted her widowed mother, who I feared was of a plotting and mercenary turn of mind, but I thought as well of her as I could for Christiana's sake. I never had loved any one but Christiana, and she had been all the world, and oh, far more than all the world to me from our childhood!

Christiana accepted me with her mother's consent, and I was rendered very happy indeed. My life at my Uncle Chill's was of a spare, dull kind, and my garret chamber was as dull, and bare, and cold as an upper prison room in some stern northern fortress. But having Christiana's love I wanted nothing upon earth. I would not have changed my lot with any human being.

Avarice was unhappily my Uncle Chill's master-vice. Though he was rich he pinched, and scraped, and clutched, and lived miserably. As Christiana had no fortune I was for some time a little fearful of confessing our engagement to him; but at length I wrote him a letter, saying how it all truly was. I put it into his hand one night on going to bed.

As I came downstairs next morning shivering in the cold December air, colder in my uncle's unwarmed house than in the street, where the winter sun did sometimes shine and which was at all events enlivened by cheerful faces and voices passing along, I carried a heavy heart toward the long, low breakfast-room in which my uncle sat. It was a large room with a small fire, and there was a great bay-window in it which the rain had marked in the night as if with the tears of houseless people. It stared upon a raw yard with a cracked stone pavement and some rusted iron railings half-uprooted, whence an ugly out-building that had once been a dissecting-room (in the time of the great surgeon who had mortgaged the house to my uncle) stared at it.

We rose so early always that at that time of the year we breakfasted by candle-light. When I went into the room my uncle was so contracted by the cold and so huddled together in his chair behind the one dim candle that I did not see him until I was close to the table.

As I held out my hand to him he caught up his stick (being infirm he always walked about the house with a stick) and made a blow at me and said: "You fool!"

"Uncle," I returned, "I didn't expect you to be so angry as this." Nor had I expected it, though he was a hard and angry old man.

"You didn't expect!" said he; "when did you ever expect? When did you ever calculate or look forward, you contemptible dog?"

"These are hard words, uncle!"

"Hard words? Feathers, to pelt such an idiot as you with," said he. "Here! Betsy Snap! Look at him!"

Betsy Snap was a withered, hard-favored, yellow old woman—our only domestic—always employed at this time of the morning in rubbing my uncle's legs. As my uncle adjured her to look at me he put his lean grip on the crown of her head, she kneeling beside him, and turned her face toward me. An involuntary thought connecting them both with the dissecting-room as it must often have been in the surgeon's time passed across my mind in the midst of my anxiety.

"Look at the sniveling milksop!" said my uncle. "Look at the baby! This is the gentleman who people say is nobody's enemy but his own. This is the gentleman who can't say no. This is the gentleman who was making such large profits in his business that he must needs take a partner t'other day. This is the gentleman who is going to marry a wife without a penny, and who falls into the hands of Jezabels who are speculating on my death!"

I knew now how great my uncle's rage was; for nothing short of his being almost beside himself would have induced him to utter that concluding word, which he held in such repugnance that it was never spoken or hinted at before him on any account.

"On my death," he repeated, as if he were defying me by defying his own abhorrence of the word. "On my death—death—death! But I'll spoil the speculation. Eat your last under this roof, you feeble wretch, and may it choke you!"

You may suppose that I had not much appetite for the breakfast to which I was bidden in these terms, but I took my accustomed seat. I saw that I was repudiated henceforth by my uncle; still I could bear that very well, possessing Christiana's heart.

He emptied his basin of bread-and-milk as usual, only that he took it on his knees with his chair turned away from the table where I sat. When he had done he carefully snuffed out the candle, and the cold, slate-colored, miserable day looked in upon us.

"Now, Mr. Michael," said he, "before we part I should like to have a word with these ladies in your presence."

"As you will, sir," I returned; "but you deceive yourself and wrong us cruelly if you suppose that there is any feeling at stake in this contract but pure, disinterested, faithful love."

To this he only replied, "You lie!" and not one other word.

We went through half-thawed snow and half-frozen rain to the house where Christiana and her mother lived. My uncle knew them very well. They were sitting at their breakfast and were surprised to see us at that hour.

"Your servant, ma'am," said my uncle to the mother. "You divine the purpose of my visit, I dare say, ma'am. I understand there is a world of pure, disinterested, faithful love cooped up here. I am happy to bring it all it wants to make it complete. I bring you your son-in-law, ma'am—and you your husband, miss. The gentleman is a perfect stranger to me, but I wish him joy of his wise bargain."

He snarled at me as he went out, and I never saw him again.

It is altogether a mistake (continued the poor relation) to suppose that my dear Christiana, over-persuaded and influenced by her mother, married a rich man, the dirt from whose carriage wheels is often, in these changed times, thrown upon me as she rides by. No, no. She married me.

The way we came to be married rather sooner than we intended was this. I took a frugal lodging and was saving and planning for her sake, when one day she spoke to me with great earnestness and said:

"My dear Michael, I have given you my heart. I have said that I loved you and I have pledged myself to be your wife. I am as much yours through all changes of good and evil as if we had been married on the day when such words passed between us. I know you well, and know that if we should be separated and our union broken off, your whole life would be shadowed, and all that might, even now, be stronger in your character for the conflict with the world would then be weakened to the shadow of what it is!"

"God help me, Christiana!" said I. "You speak the truth."

"Michael!" said she, putting her hand in mine in all maidenly devotion, "let us keep apart no longer. It is but for me to say that I can live contented upon such means as you have, and I well know you are happy. I say so from my heart. Strive no more alone; let us strive together. My dear Michael, it is not right that I should keep secret from you what you do not suspect, but what distresses my whole life. My mother, without considering that what you have lost you have lost for me, and on the assurance of my faith, sets her heart on riches and urges another suit upon me, to my misery. I cannot bear this, for to bear it is to be untrue to you. I would rather share your struggles than look on. I want no better home than you can give me. I know that you will aspire and labor with a higher courage if I am wholly yours, and let it be so when you will!"

I was blessed indeed that day and a new world opened to me. We were married in a very little while and I took my wife to our happy home. That was the beginning of the residence I have spoken of; the castle we have ever since inhabited together dates from that time. All our children have been born in it. Our first child—now married—was a little girl whom we called Christiana. Her son is so like little Frank that I hardly know which is which.

The current impression as to my partner's dealings with me is also quite erroneous. He did not begin to treat me coldly as a poor simpleton when my uncle and I so fatally quarreled; nor did he afterward gradually possess himself of our business and edge me out. On the contrary, he behaved to me with the utmost good faith and honor.

Matters between us took this turn. On the day of my separation from my uncle, and even before the arrival at our counting-house of my trunks (which he sent after me, not carriage paid), I went down to our room of business on our little wharf overlooking the river, and there I told John Spatter what had happened. John did not say in reply that rich old relatives were palpable facts and that love and sentiment were moonshine and fiction. He addressed me thus:

"Michael," said John, "we were at school together, and

I generally had the knack of getting on better than you and making a higher reputation."

"You had, John," I returned.

"Although," said John, "I borrowed your books and lost them; borrowed your pocket-money and never repaid it; got you to buy my damaged knives at a higher price than I had given for them new; and to own to the windows that I had broken."

"All not worth mentioning, John Spatter," said I, "but certainly true."

"When you were first established in this infant business, which promises to thrive so well," pursued John, "I came to you in my search for almost any employment, and you made me your clerk."

"Still not worth mentioning, my dear John Spatter," said I; "still equally true."

"And finding that I had a good head for business and that I was really useful to the business, you did not like to retain me in that capacity, and thought it an act of justice soon to make me your partner."

"Still less worth mentioning than any of those other little circumstances you have recalled, John Spatter," said I; "for I was and am sensible of your merits and my deficiencies."

"Now, my good friend," said John, drawing my arm through his, as he had had a habit of doing at school, while two vessels outside the windows of our counting-house—which were shaped like the stern windows of a ship--went lightly down the river with the tide, as John and I might then be sailing away in company and in trust and confidence on our long voyage of life, "let there under these friendly circumstances be a right understanding between us. You are too easy, Michael. You are nobody's enemy but your own. If I were to give you that damaging character among our connection, with a shrug and a shake of the head and a sigh, and if I were further to abuse the trust you place in me——"

"But you never will abuse it at all, John," I observed.

"Never!" said he; "but I am putting a case—I say, and if I were further to abuse that trust by keeping this piece of our common affairs in the dark, and this other piece in the light, and again this other piece in the twilight and so on, I should strengthen my strength and weaken your weakness day by day, until at last I found myself on the high-road to fortune and you left behind on some base common, a hopeless number of miles out of the way."

"Exactly so," said I.

"To prevent this, Michael," said John Spatter, "or the remotest chance of this, there must be perfect openness between us. Nothing must be concealed, and we must have but one interest."

"My dear John Spatter," I assured him, "that is precisely what I mean."

"And when you are too easy," pursued John, his face glowing with friendship, "you must allow me to prevent that imperfection in your nature from being taken advantage of by any one; you must not expect me to humor it——"

"My dear John Spatter," I interrupted, "I don't expect you to humor it. I want to correct it."

"And I, too," said John.

"Exactly so!" cried I. "We both have the same end in view; and honorably seeking it and fully trusting one another, and having but one interest, ours will be a prosperous and happy partnership."

"I am sure of it!" returned John Spatter. And we shook hands most affectionately.

I took John home to my castle and we had a very happy day. Our partnership throve well. My friend and partner supplied what I wanted, as I had foreseen that he would; and by improving both the business and myself, amply acknowledged any little rise in life to which I had helped him.

I am not (said the poor relation, looking at the fire as he slowly rubbed his hands) very rich, for I never cared to be that; but I have enough and I am above all moderate wants and anxieties. My castle is not a splendid place, but it is very comfortable, and it has a warm and cheerful air and is quite a picture of home.

Our eldest girl, who is very like her mother, married John Spatter's eldest son. Our two families are closely united in other ties of attachment. It is very pleasant of an evening when we are all assembled together—which frequently happens—and when John and I talk over old times and the one interest there has always been between us.

I really do not know in my castle what loneliness is. Some of our children or grandchildren are always about it, and the young voices of my descendants are delightful —oh, how delightful!—to me to hear. My dearest and most devoted wife, ever faithful, ever loving, ever helpful and sustaining and consoling, is the priceless blessing of my house, from whom all its other blessings spring. We are rather a musical family, and when Christiana sees me at any time a little weary or depressed, she steals to the piano and sings a gentle air she used to sing when we were first betrothed. So weak a man am I that I cannot bear to hear it from any other source. They played it once at the theater when I was there with little Frank; and the child said, wondering: "Cousin Michael, whose hot tears are these that have fallen on my hand?"

Such is my castle and such are the real particulars of my life therein preserved. I often take little Frank home there. He is very welcome to my grandchildren and they play together. At this time of the year—the Christmas and New Year time—I am seldom out of my castle. For the associations of the season seem to hold me there and the precepts of the season seem to teach me that it is well to be there.

"And the castle is——" observed a grave, kind voice among the company.

"Yes. My castle," said the poor relation, shaking his head as he still looked at the fire, "is in the air. John, our esteemed host, suggests its situation accurately. My castle is in the air! I have done. Will you be so good as to pass the story?"

THE CHILD'S STORY.

Once upon a time a good many years ago there was a traveler and he set out upon a journey. It was a magic journey and was to seem very long when he began it and very short when he got half-way through.

He traveled along a rather dark path for some little time without meeting anything, until at last he came to a beautiful child. So he said to the child: "What do you do here?" And the child said: "I am always at play. Come and play with me!"

So he played with that child the whole day long, and they were very merry. The sky was so blue, the sun was so bright, the water was so sparkling, the leaves were so green, the flowers were so lovely, and they heard such singing birds and saw so many butterflies that everything was beautiful. This was in fine weather. When it rained they loved to watch the falling drops and to smell the fresh scents. When it blew it was delightful to listen to the wind and fancy what it said as it came rushing from its home—where was that? they wondered—whistling and howling, driving the clouds before it, bending the trees, rumbling in the chimneys, shaking the house, and making the sea roar in fury. But when it snowed that was best of all; for they liked nothing so well as to look up at the white flakes falling fast and thick like down from the breasts of millions of white birds and to see how smooth and deep the drift was, and to listen to the hush upon the paths and roads.

They had plenty of the finest toys in the world and the most astonishing picture-books: all about scimitars and slippers and turbans, and dwarfs and giants and genii and fairies, and blue-beards and bean-stalks, and riches and caverns and forests, and Valentines and Orsons: and all new and all true.

But one day, of a sudden, the traveler lost the child. He called to him over and over again, but got no answer. So he went upon his road, and went on for a little while without meeting anything, until at last he came to a handsome boy. So he said to the boy: "What do you do here?" And the boy said: "I am always learning. Come and learn with me."

So he learned with that boy about Jupiter and Juno, and the Greeks and the Romans, and I don't know what, and learned more than I could tell—or he either, for he soon forgot a deal of it. But they were not always learning; they had the merriest games that ever were played. They rowed upon the river in summer and skated on the ice in winter; they were active afoot and active on horseback; at cricket and all games at ball; at prisoners' base, hare and hounds, follow my leader, and more sports than I can think of; nobody could beat them. They had holidays too, and twelfth cakes, and parties where they danced till midnight, and real theaters where they saw palaces of real gold and silver rise out of the real earth and saw all the wonders of the world at once. As to friends, they had such dear friends and so many of them that I want the time to reckon them up. They were all young like the handsome boy, and were never to be strange to one another all their lives through.

Still, one day in the midst of all these pleasures the traveler lost the boy as he had lost the child, and after calling to him in vain went on upon his journey. So he went on for a little while without seeing anything, until at last he came to a young man. So he said to the young man: "What do you do here?" And the young man said: "I am always in love. Come and love with me."

So he went away with that young man, and presently they came to one of the prettiest girls that ever was seen —just like Fanny in the corner there—and she had eyes like Fanny, and hair like Fanny, and dimples like Fanny's, and she laughed and colored just as Fanny does while I am talking about her. So the young man fell in love directly—just as somebody I won't mention the first time he came here did with Fanny. Well, he was teased sometimes—just as somebody used to be by Fanny; and they quarreled sometimes—just as somebody and Fanny used to quarrel; and they made it up and sat in the dark, and wrote letters every day, and never were happy asunder, and were always looking out for one another and pretending not to, and were engaged at Christmas time, and sat close to one another by the fire, and were going to be married very soon—all exactly like somebody I won't mention and Fanny!

But the traveler lost them one day as he had lost the rest of his friends, and after calling to them to come back, which they never did, went on upon his journey. So he went on for a little while without seeing anything, until at last he came to a middle-aged gentleman. So he said to the gentleman: "What are you doing here?" And his answer was: "I am always busy. Come and be busy with me!"

So he began to be very busy with that gentleman, and they went on through the wood together. The whole journey was through a wood, only it had been open and green at first, like a wood in spring, and now began to be thick and dark, like a wood in summer; some of the little trees that had come out earliest were even turning brown. The gentleman was not alone, but had a lady of about the same age with him, who was his wife; and they had children, who were with them too. So they all went on together through the wood, cutting down the trees and making a path through the branches and the fallen leaves and carrying burdens and working hard.

Sometimes they came to a long green avenue that opened into deeper woods. Then they would hear a very little distant voice crying: "Father, father, I am another child! Stop for me!" And presently they would see a very little figure, growing larger as it came along, running to join them. When it came up they all crowded round it and kissed and welcomed it; and then they all went on together.

Sometimes they came to several avenues at once and then they all stood still, and one of the children said, "Father, I am going to sea," and another said, "Father, I am going to India," and another, "Father, I am going to seek my fortune where I can," and another, "Father, I am going to heaven!" So with many tears at parting they went solitary down those avenues, each child upon its way; and the child who went to heaven rose into the golden air and vanished.

Whenever these partings happened the traveler looked at the gentleman, and saw him glance up at the sky above the trees, where the day was beginning to decline and the sunset to come on. He saw, too, that his hair was turning gray. But they never could rest long, for they had their journey to perform, and it was necessary for them to be always busy.

At last there had been so many partings that there were no children left, and only the traveler, the gentleman, and the lady went upon their way in company. And now the wood was yellow, and now brown, and the leaves even of the forest trees began to fall.

So they came to an avenue that was darker than the rest, and were pressing forward on their journey without looking down it, when the lady stopped.

"My husband," said the lady. "I am called."

They listened and they heard a voice a long way down the avenue say: "Mother! mother!"

It was the voice of the first child who had said, "I am going to heaven!" and the father said: "I pray not yet. The sunset is very near. I pray not yet!"

But the voice cried, "Mother! mother!" without minding him, though his hair was now quite white and tears were on his face.

Then the mother, who was already drawn into the shade of the dark avenue and moving away with her arms still round his neck, kissed him and said: "My dearest, I am summoned and I go!" And she was gone. And the traveler and he were left alone together.

And they went on and on together until they came to very near the end of the wood; so near that they could see the sunset shining red before them through the trees.

Yet once more while he broke his way among the branches the traveler lost his friend. He called and called, but there was no reply, and when he passed out of the wood and saw the peaceful sun going down upon a wide purple prospect, he came to an old man sitting on a fallen tree. So he said to the old man: "What do you do here?" And the old man said with a calm smile: "I am always remembering. Come and remember with me!"

So the traveler sat down by the side of that old man, face to face with the serene sunset, and all his friends came softly back and stood around him. The beautiful child, the handsome boy, the young man in love, the father, mother, and children: every one of them was there, and he had lost nothing. So he loved them all and was kind and forbearing with them all, and was always pleased to watch them all, and they all honored and loved him. And I think the traveler must be yourself, dear grandfather, because this is what you do to us and what we do to you.

THE SCHOOLBOY'S STORY.

Being rather young at present—I am getting on in years, but still I am rather young—I have no particular adventures of my own to fall back upon. It wouldn't much interest anybody here, I suppose, to know what a screw the reverend is, or what a griffin she is, or how they do stick it into parents—particularly hair-cutting and medical attendance. One of our fellows was charged in his half's account twelve and sixpence for two pills—tolerably profitable at six and threepence apiece, I should think—and he never took them, either, but put them up the sleeve of his jacket.

As to the beef, it's shameful. It's not beef. Regular beef isn't veins. You can chew regular beef. Besides which there's gravy to regular beef, and you never see a drop to ours. Another of our fellows went home ill, and heard the family doctor tell his father that he couldn't account for his complaint unless it was the beer. Of course it was the beer, and well it might be!

However, beef and Old Cheeseman are two different things. So is beer. It was Old Cheeseman I meant to tell about; not the manner in which our fellows get their constitutions destroyed for the sake of profit.

Why, look at the pie-crust alone. There's no flakiness in it. It's solid—like damp lead. Then our fellows get nightmares and are bolstered for calling out and waking other fellows. Who can wonder?

Old Cheeseman one night walked in his sleep, put his hat on over his night-cap, got hold of a fishing-rod and a cricket-bat, and went down into the parlor, where they naturally thought from his appearance he was a ghost. Why, he never would have done that if his meals had been wholesome. When we all begin to walk in our sleep I suppose they'll be sorry for it.

Old Cheeseman wasn't second Latin master then; he was a fellow himself. He was first brought there very small, in a post-chaise, by a woman who was always taking snuff and shaking him—and that was the most he remembered about it. He never went home for the holidays. His accounts (he never learned any extras) were sent to a bank and the bank paid them, and he had a brown suit twice a year and went into boots at twelve. They were always too big for him, too.

In the midsummer holidays some of our fellows who lived within walking distance used to come back and climb the trees outside the playground wall, on purpose to look at Old Cheeseman reading there by himself. He was always as mild as the tea—and that's pretty mild, I should hope!—so when they whistled to him, he looked up and nodded; and when they said, "Halloo, Old Cheeseman, what have you had for dinner?" he said, "Boiled mutton;" and when they said, "Ain't it solitary, Old Cheeseman?" he said, "It is a little dull sometimes;" and then they said, "Well, good-by, Old Cheeseman!" and climbed down again. Of course it was imposing on Old Cheeseman to give him nothing but boiled mutton through a whole vacation, but that was just like the system. When they didn't give him boiled mutton, they gave him rice pudding, pretending it was a treat. And saved the butcher.

So Old Cheeseman went on. The holidays brought him into other troubles besides the loneliness; because when the fellows began to come back, not wanting to, he was always glad to see them; which was aggravating when they were not at all glad to see him, and so he got his head knocked against walls, and that was the way his nose bled. But he was a favorite in general. Once a subscription was raised for him; and to keep up his spirits he was presented before the holidays with two white mice, a rabbit, a pigeon, and a beautiful puppy. Old Cheeseman cried about it—especially soon afterward when they all ate one another.

Of course Old Cheeseman used to be called by the names of all sorts of cheeses—Double Glo'sterman, Family Cheshireman, Dutchman, North Wiltshireman, and all that. But he never minded it. And I don't mean to say he was old in point of years—because he wasn't—only he was called from the first, Old Cheeseman.

At last Old Cheeseman was made second Latin master. He was brought in one morning at the beginning of a new half, and presented to the school in that capacity as "Mr. Cheeseman." Then our fellows all agreed that Old Cheeseman was a spy and a deserter, who had gone over to the enemy's camp and sold himself for gold. It was no excuse for him that he had sold himself for very little gold—two pound ten a quarter and his washing, as was reported. It was decided by a parliament which sat about it that Old Cheeseman's mercenary motives could alone be taken into account and that he had "coined our blood for drachmas." The parliament took the expression out of the quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius.

When it was settled in this strong way that Old Cheeseman was a tremendous traitor, who had wormed himself into our fellows' secrets on purpose to get himself into favor by giving up everything he knew, all courageous fellows were invited to come forward and enroll themselves in a society for making a set against him. The president of the society was first boy, named Bob Tarter. His father was in the West Indies, and he owned himself that his father was worth millions. He had great power among our fellows, and he wrote a parody beginning—

"Who made believe to be so meek
That we could hardly hear him speak,
Yet turned out an informing sneak?
Old Cheeseman"—

and on in that way through more than a dozen verses, which he used to go and sing every morning, close by the new master's desk. He trained one of the low boys, too, a rosy-cheeked little brass who didn't care what he did, to go up to him with his Latin grammar one morning and say it so: *Nominativus pronominum*—Old Cheeseman, *raro exprimitur*—was never suspected, *nisi distinctionis*—of being an informer, *aut emphasis gratiâ*—until he proved one. *Ut*—for instance, *Vos damnastis*—when he sold the boys. *Quasi*—as though, *dicat*—he should say, *Pretærea nemo*—I'm a Judas! All this produced a great effect on Old Cheeseman. He had never had much hair, but what he had began to get thinner and thinner every day. He grew paler and more worn, and sometimes of an evening he was seen sitting at his desk with a precious long snuff to his candle, and his hands before his face crying. But no member of the society could pity him, even if he felt inclined, because the president said it was Old Cheeseman's conscience.

So Old Cheeseman went on and didn't he lead a miserable life! Of course the reverend turned up his nose at him, and of course she did—because both of them always do that at all the masters—but he suffered from the fellows most and he suffered from them constantly. He never told about it that the society could find out; but he got no credit for that, because the president said it was Old Cheeseman's cowardice.

He had only one friend in the world and that one was almost as powerless as he was, for it was only Jane. Jane was a sort of wardrobe woman to our fellows and took care of the boxes. She had come at first, I believe, as a kind of apprentice—some of our fellows say from a charity, but I don't know—and after her time was out had stopped at so much a year. So little a year, perhaps I ought to say, for it is far more likely. However, she had put some pounds in the savings bank, and she was a very nice young woman. She was not quite pretty, but she had a very frank, honest, bright face, and all our fellows were fond of her. She was uncommonly neat and cheerful and uncommonly comfortable and kind. And if anything was the matter with a fellow's mother, he always went and showed the letter to Jane.

Jane was Old Cheeseman's friend. The more the society went against him, the more Jane stood by him. She used to give him a good-humored look out of her still-room window sometimes that seemed to set him up for the day. She used to pass out of the orchard and the kitchen garden (always kept locked, I believe you!) through the playground, when she might have gone the other way, only to give a turn of her head, as much as to say "Keep up your spirits!" to Old Cheeseman. His slip of a room was so fresh and orderly that it was well known who looked after it while he was at his desk; and when our fellows saw a smoking hot dumpling on his plate at dinner, they knew with indignation who had sent it up.

Under these circumstances the society resolved after a quantity of meeting and debating that Jane should be requested to cut Old Cheeseman dead; and that if she refused she must be sent to Coventry herself. So a deputation headed by the president was appointed to wait on Jane, and inform her of the vote the society had been under the painful necessity of passing. She was very much respected for all her good qualities, and there was a story about her having once waylaid the reverend in his own study and got a fellow off from severe punishment, of her own kind comfortable heart. So the deputation didn't much like the job. However, they went up and the president told Jane all about it. Upon which Jane turned very red, burst into tears, informed the president and the deputation, in a way not at all like her usual way, that they were a parcel of malicious young savages, and turned the whole respected body out of the room. Consequently it was entered in the society's book (kept in astronomical cipher for fear of detection) that all communication with Jane was interdicted; and the president addressed the members on this convincing instance of Old Cheeseman's undermining.

But Jane was as true to Old Cheeseman as Old Cheeseman was false to our fellows—in their opinion, at all events—and steadily continued to be his only friend. It was a great exasperation to the society, because Jane was as much a loss to them as she was a gain to him; and being more inveterate against him than ever, they treated him worse than ever. At last, one morning, his desk stood empty, his room was peeped into and found to be vacant, and a whisper went about among the pale faces of our fellows that Old Cheeseman, unable to bear it any longer, had got up early and drowned himself.

The mysterious looks of the other masters after breakfast and the evident fact that Old Cheeseman was not expected confirmed the society in this opinion. Some began to discuss whether the president was liable to hanging or only transportation for life, and the president's face showed a great anxiety to know which. However, he said that a jury of his country should find him game, and that in his address he should put it to them to lay their hands upon their hearts and say whether they as Britons approved of informers, and how they thought they would like it themselves. Some of the society considered that he had better run away until he found a forest, where he might change clothes with a wood-cutter and stain his face with blackberries; but the majority believed that if he stood his ground, his father, belonging as he did to the West Indies and being worth millions, could buy him off.

All our fellows' hearts beat fast when the reverend came in and made a sort of a Roman or a field marshal of himself with the ruler, as he always did before delivering an address. But their fears were nothing to their astonishment when he came out with the story that Old Cheeseman, "so long our respected friend and fellow-prigrim in the pleasant plains of knowledge," he called him—oh, yes! I dare say! Much of that!—was the orphan child of a disinherited young lady who had married against her father's wish, and whose young husband had died, and who had died of sorrow herself, and whose unfortunate baby (Old Cheeseman) had been brought up at the cost of a grandfather who would never consent to see it, baby, boy, or man: which grandfather was now dead, and serve him right—that's my putting in—and which grandfather's large property, there being no will, was now, and all of a sudden and forever, Old Cheeseman's! Our so-long-respected friend and fellow-pilgrim in the pleasant plains of knowledge, the reverend wound up a lot of bothering quotations by saying, would "come among us once more" that day fortnight, when he desired to take leave of us himself in a more particular manner. With these words he stared severely round at our fellows and went solemnly out.

There was precious consternation among the members of the society now. Lots of them wanted to resign, and lots more began to try to make out that they had never belonged to it. However, the president stuck up and said that they must stand or fall together, and that if a breach was made it should be over his body—which was meant to encourage the society; but it didn't. The president further said he would consider the position in which they stood, and would give them his best opinion and advice in a few days. This was eagerly looked for, as he knew a good deal of the world on account of his father's being in the West Indies.

After days and days of hard thinking and drawing armies all over his slate, the president called our fellows together and made the matter clear. He said it was plain that when Old Cheeseman came on the appointed day, his first revenge would be to impeach the society and have it flogged all round. After witnessing with joy the torture of his enemies and gloating over the cries which agony would extort from them, the probability was that he would invite the reverend, on pretense of conversation, into a private room—say the parlor into which parents were shown, where the two great globes were which were never used—and would there reproach him with the various frauds and oppressions he had endured at his hands. At the close of his observations he would make a signal to a prize-fighter concealed in the passage, who would then appear and pitch into the reverend till he was left insensible. Old Cheeseman would then make Jane a present of from £5 to £10 and would leave the establishment in fiendish triumph.

The president explained that against the parlor part, or the Jane part, of these arrangements he had nothing to say; but on the part of the society he counseled deadly resistance. With this view he recommended that all available desks should be filled with stones, and that the first word of the complaint should be the signal to every fellow to let fly at Old Cheeseman. The bold advice put the society in better spirits and was unanimously taken. A post about Old Cheeseman's size was put up in the playground, and all our fellows practiced at it till it was dented all over.

When the day came and places were called every fellow sat down in a tremble. There had been much discussing and disputing as to how Old Cheeseman would come, but it was the general opinion that he would appear in a sort of triumphal car drawn by four horses, with two livery servants in front and the prize-fighter in disguise up behind. So all our fellows sat listening for the sound of wheels. But no wheels were heard, for Old Cheeseman walked after all and came into the school without any preparation. Pretty much as he used to be, only dressed in black.

"Gentlemen," said the reverend, presenting him, "our so-long-respceted friend and fellow-pilgrim in the pleasant plains of knowledge is desirous to offer a word or two. Attention, gentlemen, one and all!"

Every fellow stole his hand into his desk and looked at the president. The president was all ready and taking aim at Old Cheeseman with his eyes.

What did Old Cheeseman then but walk up to his old desk, look round him with a queer smile as if there was a tear in his eye, and begin in a quavering mild voice: "My dear companions and old friends!"

Every fellow's hand came out of his desk, and the president suddenly began to cry.

"My dear companions and old friends," said Old Cheeseman, "you have heard of my good fortune. I have passed so many years under this roof—my entire life so far, I may say—that I hope you have been glad to hear of it for my sake. I could never enjoy it without exchanging congratulations with you. If we have ever misunderstood one another at all, pray my dear boys let us forgive and forget. I have a great tenderness for you, and I am sure you return it. I want in the fullness of a grateful heart to shake hands with you every one. I have come back to do it, if you please, my dear boys."

Since the president had begun to cry, several other fellows had broken out here and there; but now, when Old Cheeseman began with him as first boy, laid his left hand affectionately on his shoulder and gave him his right, and when the president said "Indeed, I don't deserve it, sir; upon my honor I don't;" there was sobbing and crying all over the school. Every other fellow said he didn't deserve it, much in the same way; but Old Cheeseman, not minding that a bit, went cheerfully round to every boy, and wound up with every master—finishing off the reverend last.

Then a sniveling little chap in a corner, who was always under some punishment or other, set up a shrill cry of "Success to Old Cheeseman! Hooray!" The reverend glared upon him and said: "Mr. Cheeseman, sir." But Old Cheeseman protesting that he liked his old name a great deal better than his new one, all our fellows took up the cry; and for I don't know how many minutes, there was such a thundering of feet and hands, and such roaring of Old Cheeseman, as never was heard.

After that there was a spread in the dining-room of the most magnificent kind. Fowls, tongues, preserves, fruits, confectioneries, jellies, neguses, barley-sugar temples, trifles, crackers—eat all you can and pocket what you like—all at Old Cheeseman's expense. After that speeches, whole holiday, double and treble sets of all manners of things for all manners of games, donkeys, pony-chaises and drive yourself, dinner for all the masters at the Seven Bells (£20 a head our fellows estimated it at), an annual holiday and feast fixed for that day every year, and another on Old Cheeseman's birthday—reverend bound down before the fellows to allow it, so that he could never back out—all at Old Cheeseman's expense.

And didn't our fellows go down in a body and cheer outside the Seven Bells? Oh no!

But there's something else besides. Don't look at the next story-teller for there's more yet. Next day it was resolved that the society should make it up with Jane, and then be dissolved. What do you think of Jane being gone though! "What? Gone forever?" said our fellows with long faces. "Yes, to be sure," was all the answer they could get. None of the people about the house would say anything more. At length the first boy took upon himself to ask the reverend whether our old friend Jane was really gone? The reverend (he has got a daughter at home—turn-up nose and red) replied severely: "Yes, sir, Miss Pitt is gone." The idea of calling Jane Miss Pitt! Some said she had been sent away in disgrace for taking money from Old Cheeseman; others said she had gone into Old Cheeseman's service at a rise of £10 a year. All that our fellows knew was she was gone.

It was two or three months afterward when one afternoon an open carriage stopped at the cricket-field, just outside bounds, with a lady and gentleman in it, who looked at the game a long time and stood up to see it played. Nobody thought much about them until the same little sniveling chap came in against all rules, from the post where he was scout and said: "It's Jane!" Both elevens forgot the game directly, and ran crowding round the carriage. It was Jane! In such a bonnet! And if you'll believe me Jane was married to Old Cheeseman.

It soon became quite a regular thing when our fellows were hard at it in the playground, to see a carriage at the low part of the wall where it joins the high part, and a lady and gentleman standing up in it looking over. The gentleman was always Old Cheeseman, and the lady was always Jane.

The first time I ever saw them I saw them in that way. There had been a good many changes among our fellows then, and it had turned out that Bob Tarter's father wasn't worth millions! He wasn't worth anything. Bob had gone for a soldier, and Old Cheeseman had purchased his discharge. But that's not the carriage. The carriage stopped and all our fellows stopped as soon as it was seen.

"So you have never sent me to coventry after all!" said the lady laughing, as our fellows swarmed up the wall to shake hands with her. "Are you never going to do it?"

"Never! never! never!" on all sides.

I didn't understand what she meant then, but of course I do now. I was very much pleased with her face though, and with her good way, and I couldn't help looking at her—and at him too—with all our fellows clustering so joyfully about them.

They soon took notice of me as a new boy, so I thought I might as well swarm up the wall myself, and shake hands with them as the rest did. I was quite as glad to see them as the rest were, and was quite as familiar with them in a moment.

"Only a fortnight now," said Old Cheeseman, "to the holidays. Who stops? Anybody?"

A good many fingers pointed at me, and a good many voices cried: "He does!" For it was the year when you were all away; and rather low I was about it I can tell you.

"Oh!" said Old Cheeseman. "But it's solitary here in the holiday time. He had better come to us."

So I went to their delightful house and was as happy as I could possibly be. They understand how to conduct themselves toward boys, they do. When they take a boy to the play, for instance, they do take him. They don't go in after it's begun or come out before it's over. They know how to bring a boy up too. Look at their own! Though he is very little as yet, what a capital boy he is! Why, my next favorite to Mrs. Cheeseman and Old Cheeseman, is young Cheeseman.

So now I have told you all I know about Old Cheeseman. And it's not much after all I am afraid. Is it?

NOBODY'S STORY.

He lived on the bank of a mighty river, broad and deep, which was always silently rolling on to a vast undiscovered ocean. It had rolled on ever since the world began. It had changed its course sometimes and turned into new channels, leaving its old ways dry and barren; but it had ever been upon the flow, and ever was to flow until Time should be no more. Against its strong, unfathomable stream, nothing made head. No living creature, no flower, no leaf, no particle of animate or inanimate existence ever strayed back from the undiscovered ocean. The tide of the river set resistlessly toward it;

and the tide never stopped any more than the earth stops in its circling round the sun.

He lived in a busy place and he worked very hard to live. He had no hope of ever being rich enough to live a month without hard work, but he was quite content, God knows, to labor with a cheerful will. He was one of an immense family, all of whose sons and daughters gained their daily bread by daily work, prolonged from their rising up betimes until their lying down at night. Beyond this destiny he had no prospect and he sought none. There was overmuch drumming, trumpeting, and speech-making, in the neighborhood where he dwelt; but he had nothing to do with that. Such clash and uproar came from the Bigwig family, at the unaccountable proceedings of which race, he marveled much. They set up the strangest statues, in iron, marble, bronze and brass, before his door; and darkened his house with the legs and tails of uncouth images of horses. He wondered what it all meant, smiled in a rough good-humored way he had and kept at his hard work. The Bigwig family (composed of all the stateliest people thereabouts, and all the noisiest) had undertaken to save him the trouble of thinking for himself, and to manage him and his affairs. "Why, truly," said he, "I have little time upon my hands; and if you'll be so good as to take care of me in return for the money I pay over"—for the Bigwig family were not above his money—"I shall be relieved and much obliged considering that you know best." Hence the drumming, trumpeting, and speech-making, and the ugly images of horses which he was expected to fall down and worship.

"I don't understand all this," said he, rubbing his furrowed brow confusedly. "But it has a meaning maybe, if I could find it out."

"It means," returned the Bigwig family, suspecting something of what he said, "honor and glory in the highest, to the highest merit."

"Oh," said he. And he was glad to hear that.

But when he looked among the images in iron, marble, bronze and brass, he failed to find a rather meritorious countryman of his, once the son of a Warwickshire wood-dealer, or any single countryman whomsoever of that kind. He could find none of the men whose knowledge had rescued him and his children from terrific and disfiguring disease, whose boldness had raised his forefathers from the condition of serfs, whose wise fancy had opened a new and high existence to the humblest, whose skill had filled the workingman's world with accumulated wonders. Whereas, he did find others whom he knew no good of, and even others whom he knew much ill of.

"Humph!" said he. "I don't quite understand it."

So he went home and sat down by his fireside to get it out of his mind.

Now, his fireside was a bare one, all hemmed in by blackened streets; but it was a precious place to him. The hands of his wife were hardened with toil, and she was old before her time; but she was dear to him. His children stunted in their growth, bore traces of unwholesome nurture; but they had beauty in his sight. Above all other things it was an earnest desire of this man's soul that his children should be taught. "If I am sometimes misled," said he, "for want of knowledge, at least let them know better and avoid my mistakes. If it is hard to me to reap the harvest of pleasures and instruction that is stored in books, let it be easier to them."

But the Bigwig family broke out into violent family quarrels concerning what it was lawful to teach to this man's children. Some of the family insisted on such a thing being primary and indispensable above all other things; and others of the family insisted on such another thing being primary and indispensable above all other things; and the Bigwig family, rent into factions, wrote pamphlets, held convocations, delivered charges, orations, and all varieties of discourses; impounded one another in courts lay and courts ecclesiastical; threw dirt, exchanged pummelings, and fell together by the ears in unintelligible animosity. Meanwhile, this man in his short evening snatches at his fireside, saw the demon ignorance arise there and take his children to himself. He saw his daughter perverted into a heavy slatternly drudge; he saw his son go moping down the ways of low sensuality, to brutality and crime; he saw the dawning light of intelligence in the eyes of his babies so changing into cunning and suspicion that he could have rather wished them idiots.

"I don't understand this any the better," said he; "but I think it cannot be right. Nay, by the clouded heaven above me, I protest against this as my wrong!"

Becoming peaceable again (for his passion was usually short-lived, and his nature kind), he looked about him on his Sundays and holidays, and he saw how much monotony and weariness there was, and thence how drunkenness arose with all its train of ruin. Then he appealed to the Bigwig family, and said: "We are a laboring people, and I have a glimmering suspicion in me that laboring people of whatever condition were made—by a higher intelligence than yours, as I poorly understand it—to be in need of mental refreshment and recreation. See what we fall into when we rest without it. Come! Amuse me harmlessly, show me something, give me an escape!"

But here the Bigwig family fell into a state of uproar absolutely deafening. When some few voices were faintly heard proposing to show him the wonders of the world, the greatness of creation, the mighty changes of time, the workings of nature and the beauties of art—to show him these things, that is to say, at any period of his life when he could look upon them—there arose among the Bigwigs such roaring and raving, such pulpiting and petitioning, such maundering and memorializing, such name-calling and dirt-throwing, such a shrill wind of parliamentary questioning and feeble replying—where "I dare not" waited on "I would"—that the poor fellow stood aghast, staring wildly around.

"Have I provoked all this," said he, with his hands to his affrighed ears, "by what was meant to be an innocent request, plainly arising out of my familiar experience, and the common knowledge of all men who choose to open their eyes? I don't understand, and I am not understood. What is to come of such a state of things!"

He was bending over his work, often asking himself the question, when the news began to spread that a pestilence had appeared among the laborers, and was slaying them by thousands. Going forth to look about him he soon found this to be true. The dying and the dead were mingled in the close and tainted houses among which his life was passed. New poison was distilled into the always murky, always sickening air. The robust and the weak, old age and infancy, the father and the mother, all were stricken down alike.

What means of flight had he? He remained there where he was, and saw those who were dearest to him die.

A kind preacher came to him, and would have said some prayers to soften his heart in his gloom, but he replied:

"Oh, what avails it, missionary, to come to me, a man condemned to residence in this fœtid place where every sense bestowed upon me for my delight becomes a torment, and where every minute of my numbered days is new mire added to the heap under which I lie oppressed! But give me my first glimpse of heaven, through a little of its light and air; give me pure water; help me to be clean; lighten this heavy atmosphere and heavy life, in which our spirits sink, and we become the indifferent and callous creatures you too often see us; gently and kindly take the bodies of those who die among us, out of the small room where we grow to be so familiar with the awful change that even its scanctity is lost to us; and teacher, then I will hear—none know better than you, how willingly—of him whose thoughts were so much with the poor, and who had compassion for all human sorrow!"

He was at his work again solitary and sad, when his master came and stood near to him dressed in black. He, also, had suffered heavily. His young wife, his beautiful and good young wife, was dead; so, too, his only child.

"Master, 'tis hard to bear—I know it—but be comforted. I would give you comfort if I could."

The master thanked him from his heart, but said he: "Oh, you laboring men! The calamity began among you. If you had but lived more healthily and decently, I should not be the widowed and bereft mourner that I am this day."

"Master," returned the other shaking his head, "I have begun to understand a little that most calamities will come from us as this one did, and that none will stop at our poor doors, until we are united with that great squabbling family yonder, to do the things that are right. We cannot live healthily and decently, unless they who undertook to manage us provide the means. We cannot be instructed unless they will teach us; we cannot be rationally amused unless they will amuse us; we cannot but have some false gods of our own, while they set up so many of theirs in all the public places. The evil consequences of imperfect instruction, the evil consequences of pernicious neglect, the evil consequences of unnatural restraint and the denial of humanizing enjoyments, will all come from us, and none of them will stop with us. They will spread far and wide. They always do; they always have done—just like the pestilence. I understand so much, I think, at last."

But the master said again: "Oh, you laboring men! How seldom do we ever hear of you, except in connection with some trouble!"

"Master," he replied, "I am nobody, and little likely to be heard of (nor yet much wanted to be heard of, perhaps), except when there is some trouble. But it never begins with me, and it never can end with me. As sure as Death it comes down to me and it goes up from me."

There was so much reason in what he said that the Bigwig family, getting wind of it, and being horribly frightened by the late desolation, resolved to unite with him to do the things that were right—at all events, so far as the said things were associated with the direct prevention, humanly speaking, of another pestilence. But as their fear wore off, which it soon began to do, they resumed their falling out among themselves and did nothing. Consequently the scourge appeared again—low down as before—and spread avengingly upward as before, and carried off vast numbers of the brawlers. But not a man among them ever admitted, if in the least degree he ever perceived, that he had anything to do with it.

So nobody lived and died in the old, old, old way; and this in the main, is the whole of nobody's story.

Had he no name, you ask? Perhaps it was Legion. It matters little what his name was. Let us call him Legion.

If you were ever in the Belgian villages near the field of Waterloo, you will have seen in some quiet little church a monument erected by faithful companions in arms to the memory of Colonel A, Major B, Captains C, D and E, Lieutenants F and G, Ensigns H, I and J, seven non-commissioned officers, and one hundred and thirty rank and file, who fell in the discharge of their duty on the memorable day. The story of nobody is the story of the rank and file of the earth. They bear their share of the battle; they have their part in the victory; they fall; they leave no name but in the mass. The march of the proudest of us, leads to the dusty way by which they go! Oh! let us think of them this year at the Christmas fire, and not forget them when it is burned out.

THE GHOST OF ART.

I AM a bachelor residing in rather a dreary set of chambers in the temple. They are situated in a square court of high houses, which would be a complete well, but for the want of water and the asbence of a bucket. I live at the top of the house among the tiles and sparrows. Like the little man in the nursery-story, I live by myself and all the bread and cheese I get—which is not much—I put upon a shelf. I need scarcely add, perhaps, that I am in love, and that the father of my charming Julia objects to our union.

I mention these little particulars as I might deliver a letter of introduction. The reader is now acquainted with me, and perhaps will condescend to listen to my narrative.

I am naturally of a dreamy turn of mind; and my abundant leisure—for I am called to the bar—coupled with much lonely listening to the twittering of sparrows, and the pattering of rain, has encouraged that disposition. In my "top set" I hear the wind howl on a winter night, when the man on the ground floor believes it is perfectly still weather. The dim lamps with which our honorable society (supposed to be as yet unconscious of the new discovery called gas) make the horrors of the staircase visible, deepen the gloom which generally settles on my soul when I go home at night.

I am in the law, but not of it. I can't exactly make out what it means. I sit in Westminister Hall sometimes (in character) from ten to four; and when I go out of court I don't know whether I am standing on my wig or my boots.

It appears to me (I mention this in confidence) as if there were too much talk and too much law—as if some grains of truth were started overboard into a tempestuous sea of chaff.

All this may make me mystical. Still I am confident that what I am going to describe myself as having seen and heard, I actually did see and hear.

It is necessary that I should observe that I have a great delight in pictures. I am no painter myself, but I have studied pictures and written about them. I have seen all the most famous pictures in the world; my education and reading have been sufficiently general to possess me beforehand with a knowledge of most of the subjects to which a painter is likely to have recourse; and although I might be in some doubt as to the rightful fashion of the scabbard of King Lear's sword, for instance, I think I should know King Lear tolerably well if I happened to meet with him.

I go to all the modern exhibitions every season, and of course I revere the Royal Academy. I stand by its forty academical articles almost as firmly as I stand by the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England. I am convinced that in neither case could there be, by any rightful possibility, one article more or less.

It is now exactly three years—three years ago this very month—since I went from Westminister to the temple one Thursday afternoon in a cheap steamboat. The sky was black when I imprudently walked on board. It began to thunder and lighten immediately afterward, and the rain poured down in torrents. The deck seeming to smoke with the wet I went below; but so many passengers were there smoking too, that I came up again and buttoning my pea-coat, and standing in the shadow of the paddle-box, stood as upright as I could and made the best of it.

It was at this moment that I first beheld the terrible being who is the subject of my present recollections.

Standing against the funnel apparently with the intention of drying himself by the heat as fast as he got wet, was a shabby man in threadbare black, and with his hands in his pockets, who fascinated me from the memorable instant when I caught his eye.

Where had I caught that eye before? Who was he? Why did I connect him all at once with the Vicar of Wakefield, Alfred the Great, Gil Blas, Charles the Second, Joseph and his Brethren, the Fairy Queen, Tom Jones, the Decameron of Boccaccio, Tam O'Shanter, the Marriage of the Doge of Venice with the Adriatic, and the Great Plague of London? Why when he bent one leg and placed one hand upon the back of the seat near him, did my mind associate him wildly with the words, "No. 142, portrait of a gentleman?" Could it be that I was going mad?

I looked at him again and now I could have taken my affidavit that he belonged to the Vicar of Wakefield's family. Whether he was the vicar, or Moses, or Mr. Burchill, or the squire, or a conglomeration of all four, I knew not; but I was impelled to seize him by the throat and charge him with being in some fell way connected with the Primrose blood. He looked up at the rain and then—oh, heaven!—he became St. John. He folded his arms, resigning himself to the weather, and I was frantically inclined to address him as the Spectator and firmly demand to know what he had done with Sir Roger de Coverley.

The frightful suspicion that I was becoming deranged, returned upon me with redoubled force. Meantime this awful stranger, inexplicably linked to my distress, stood drying himself at the funnel; and ever, as the steam rose from his clothes, diffusing a mist around him, I saw through the ghostly medium all the people I have mentioned, and a score more sacred and profane.

I am conscious of a dreadful inclination that stole upon me, as it thundered and lightened, to grapple with this man, or demon, and plunge him over the side. But I constrained myself—I know not how—to speak to him, and in a pause of the storm I crossed the deck and said:

"What are you?"

He replied hoarsely: "A model."

"A what?" said I.

"A model," he replied. "I sets to the profession for a bob a hour." (All through this narrative I give his own words which are indelibly imprinted on my memory.)

The relief which this disclosure gave me, the exquisite delight of the restoration of my confidence in my own sanity, I cannot describe. I should have fallen on his neck, but for the consciousness of being observed by the man at the wheel.

"You then," said I, shaking him so warmly by the hand that I wrung the rain out of his coat-cuff, "are the gentleman whom I have so frequently contemplated, in connection with a high-backed chair with a red cushion and a table with twisted legs."

"I am that model," he rejoined moodily, "and I wish I was anything else."

"Say not so," I returned. "I have seen you in the society of many beautiful young women;" as in truth I had and always (I now remember) in the act of making he most of his legs.

"No doubt," said he. "And you've seen me along with warses of flowers, and any number of table-kivers, and antique cabinets, and warious gammon."

"Sir?" said I.

"And warious gammon," he repeated in a louder voice. "You might have seen me in armor, too, if you had looked sharp. Blessed if I ha'n't stood in half the suits of armor as ever came out of Pratt's shop; and sat for weeks together a eating nothing out of half the gold and silver dishes as has ever been lent for the purpose out of Storrses, and Mortimerses, or Garrardses, and Davenportseses."

Excited as it appeared by the sense of injury, I thought he would never have found an end for the last word. But at length it rolled sullenly away with the thunder.

"Pardon me," said I, "you are a well-favored, well-made man, and yet—forgive me—I find, on examining my mind, that I associate you with—that my recollection indistinctly makes you, in short—excuse me—a kind of powerful monster."

"It would be a wonder if it didn't," he said. "Do you know what my points are?"

"No," said I.

"My throat and my legs," said he. "When I don't set for a head, I mostly sets for a throat and a pair of legs. Now, granted you was a painter and was to work at my throat for a week together, I suppose you'd see a lot of lumps and bumps there, that would never be there at all if you looked at me complete, instead of only my throat. Wouldn't you?"

"Probably," said I, surveying him.

"Why, it stands to reason," said the model. "Work another week at my legs and it'll be the same thing. You'll make 'em out as knotty and as knobby at last as if they was the trunks of two old trees. Then take and stick my legs and throat on to another man's body, and you'll make a regular monster. And that's the way the public gets their regular monsters every first Monday in May, when the Royal Academy Exhibition opens."

"You are a critic," said I with an air of deference.

"I'm in an uncommon ill-humor if that's it," rejoined the model with great indignation. "As if it warn't bad enough for a bob a hour, for a man to be mixing himself up with that there jolly old furniter that one 'ud think the public know'd the wery nails in by this time—or to be putting on greasy old 'ats and cloaks, and playing tamborines in the Bay o' Naples, with Wesuvius a smokin' according to pattern in the background, and the wines a bearing wonderful in the middle distance—or to be unpolitely kicking up his legs among a lot o' gals, with no reason whatever in his mind, but to show 'em—as if this warn't bad enough, I'm to go and be thrown out of employment too!"

"Surely no!" said I.

"Surely yes," said the indignant model. "But I'll grow one."

The gloomy and threatening manner in which he muttered the last words, can never be effaced from my remembrance. My blood ran cold.

I asked of myself, What it was that this desperate being was resolved to grow. My breast made no response.

I ventured to implore him to explain his meaning. With a scornful laugh he uttered this dark prophecy:

"I'll grow one. And mark my words, it shall haunt you!"

We parted in the storm after I had forced half a crown on his acceptance with a trembling hand. I conclude that something supernatural happened to the steamboat, as it bore his reeking figure down the river; but it never got into the papers.

Two years elapsed during which I followed my profession without any vicissitudes; never holding so much as a motion of course. At the expiration of that period I found myself making my way home to the temple one night, in precisely such another storm of thunder and lightning as that by which I had been overtaken on board the steamboat—except that this storm, bursting over the town at midnight, was rendered much more awful by the darkness and the hour.

As I turned into my court I really thought a thunderbolt would fall, and plow the pavement up. Every brick and stone in the place seemed to have an echo of its own for the thunder. The waterspouts were overcharged and the rain came tearing down from the house tops as if they had been mountain-tops.

Mrs. Parkins, my laundress—wife of Parkins the porter, then newly dead of a dropsy—had particular instructions to place a bedroom candle and a match under the staircase lamp on my landing in order that I might light my candle there whenever I came home. Mrs. Parkins invariably disregarding all instructions they were never there. Thus it happened that on this occasion I groped my way into my sitting-room to find the candle and came out to light it.

What were my emotions when underneath the staircase lamp, shining with wet as if he had never been dry since our last meeting, stood the mysterious being whom I had encountered on the steamboat in a thunder-storm two years before! His prediction rushed upon my mind and I turned faint.

"I said I'd do it," he observed in a hollow voice, "and I have done it. May I come in?"

"Misguided creature, what have you done?" I returned.

"I'll let you know," was his reply, "if you'll let me in."

Could it be murder that he had done? And had he been so successful that he wanted to do it again at my expense?

I hesitated.

"May I come in?" said he.

I inclined my head with as much presence of mind as I could command, and he followed me into my chambers. There I saw that the lower part of his face was tied up in what is commonly called a Blecher handkerchief. He slowly removed this bandage and exposed to view a long dark beard, curling over his upper lip, twisting about the corners of his mouth, and hanging down upon his breast.

"What is this?" I exclaimed involuntarily, "and what have you become?"

"I am the ghost of art!" said he.

The effect of these words, slowly uttered in the thunderstorm at midnight, was appalling in the last degree. More dead than alive I surveyed him in silence.

"The German taste came up," said he, "and threw me out of bread. I am ready for the taste now."

He made his beard a little jagged with his hands, folded his arms and said:

"Severity!"

I shuddered. It was so severe.

He made his beard flowing on his breast, and leaning both hands on the staff of a carpet-broom which Mrs. Parkins had left among my books, said:

"Benevolence."

I stood transfixed. The change of sentiment was entirely in the beard. The man might have left his face alone or had no face. The beard did everything.

He lay down on his back on my table, and with that action of his head threw up his beard at the chin.

"That's death!" said he.

He got off my table and looking up at the ceiling, cocked his beard a little awry; at the same time making it stick out before him.

"Adoration or a vow of vengeance," he observed.

He turned his profile to me, making his upper lip very bulgy with the upper part of his beard.

"Romantic character," said he.

He looked sideways out of his beard as if it were an ivy-bush. "Jealousy;" said he. He gave it an ingenious twist in the air, and informed me that he was carousing. He made it shaggy with his fingers—and it was despair; lank—and it was avarice: tossed it all kinds of ways—and it was rage. The beard did everything.

"I am the ghost of art," said he. "Two bob a day now, and more when it's longer! Hair's the true expression. There is no other. I said I'd grow it and I've grown it and it shall haunt you!"

He may have tumbled downstairs in the dark, but he never walked down or ran down. I looked over the banisters and I was alone with the thunder.

Need I add more of my terrific fate? It has haunted me ever since. It glares upon me from the walls of the Royal Academy (except when Maclise subdues it to his genius), it fills my soul with terror at the British institution, it lures young artists on to their destruction. Go where I will the ghost of art, eternally working the passions in hair and expressing everything by beard pursues me. The prediction is accomplished and the victim has no rest.

OUT OF TOWN.

Sitting on a bright September morning among my books and papers at my open window on the cliff overhanging the sea-beach, I have the sky and ocean framed before me like a beautiful picture. A beautiful picture, but with such movement in it, such changes of light upon the sails of ships and wake of steamboats, such dazzling gleams of silver far out at sea, such fresh touches on the crisp wave-tops as they break and roll toward me—a picture with such music in the billowy rush upon the shingle, the blowing of morning wind through the corn-sheaves where the farmers' wagons are busy, the singing of the larks, and the distant voices of children at play—such charms of sight and sound as all the galleries on earth can but poorly suggest.

So dreamy is the murmur of the sea below my window that I may have been here, for anything I know, one hundred years. Not that I have grown old, for daily on the neighboring downs and grassy hill-sides, I find that I can still in reason walk any distance, jump over anything, and climb up anywhere; but that the sound of the ocean seems to have become so customary to my musings, and other realities seem so to have gone aboard ship and floated away over the horizon, that for aught I will undertake to the contrary, I am the enchanted son of the king my father, shut up in a tower on the sea-shore for protection against an old she-goblin who insisted on being my godmother, and who foresaw at the font—wonderful creature!—that I should get into a scrape before I was twenty-one. I remember to have been in a city (my royal parent's dominions I suppose), and apparently not long ago either, that was in the dreariest condition. The principal inhabitants had all been changed into old newspapers, and in that form were preserving their window-blinds from dust, and wrapping all their smaller household gods in curlpapers. I walked through gloomy streets where every house was shut up and newspapered, and where my solitary footsteps echoed on the deserted pavements. In the public rides there were no carriages, no horses, no animated existence, but a few sleepy policemen and a few adventurous boys taking advantage of the devastation to swarm up the lamp-posts. In the westward streets there was no traffic; in the westward shops no business. The water-patterns which the 'prentices had trickled out on the pavements early in the morning remained uneffaced by human feet. At the corners of mews, Cochin-China fowls stalked gaunt and savage; nobody being left in the deserted city (as it appeared to me) to feed them. Public houses where splendid footmen swinging their legs over gorgeous hammer cloths beside wigged coachmen were wont to regale were silent, and the unused pewter pots shone too bright for business on the shelves. I beheld a Punch's show leaning against a wall near Park Lane, as if it had fainted. It was deserted and there were none to heed its desolation. In Belgrave Square I met the last man—an ostler—sitting on a post in a ragged red waistcoat, eating straw and mildewing away.

If I recollect the name of the little town on whose shore this sea is murmuring—but I am not just now, as I have promised, to be relied upon for anything—it is Pavilionstone. Within a quarter of a century it was a little fishing town, and they do say that the time was, when it was a little smuggling town. I have heard that it was rather famous in the hollands and brandy way, and that coevally with that reputation the lamplighter's was considered a bad life at the assurance offices. It was observed that if he were not particular about lighting up, he lived in peace; but that if he made the best of the oil-lamps in the steep and narrow srteets, he usually fell over the cliff at an early age. Now, gas and electricity run to the very water's edge, and the Southeastern Railway Company screech at us in the dead of night.

But the old little fishing and smuggling town remains and is so tempting a place for the latter purpose, that I think of going out some night next week in a fur cap and a pair of petticoat trousers, and running an empty tub as a kind of archæological pursuit. Let nobody with corns come to Pavilionstone, for there are breakneck flights of ragged steps connecting the principal streets by backways, which will cripple that visitor in half an hour. These are the ways by which when I run that tub I shall escape. I shall make a Thermopylæ of the corner of one of them, defend it with my cutlass against the coast guard until my brave companions have sheered off, then dive into the darkness and regain my Susan's arms. In connection with these breakneck steps I observe some wooden cottages with tumble-down out-houses and back-yards three feet square adorned with garlands of dried fish, in one of which (though the General Board of Health might object) my Susan dwells.

The Southeastern Company have brought Pavilionstone into such vogue with their tidal trains and splendid steam packets that a new Pavilionstone is rising up. I am myself of New Pavilionstone. We are a little mortary and limey at present, but we are getting on capitally. Indeed we were getting on so fast at one time that we rather overdid it and built a street of shops the business of which may be expected to arrive in about ten years. We are sensibly laid out in general; and with a little care and pains (by no means wanting so far) shall become a very pretty place. We ought to be, for our situation is delightful, our air is delicious, and our breezy hills and downs carpeted with wild thyme, and decorated with millions of wild flowers, are on the faith of a pedestrian perfect. In New Pavilionstone we are a little too much addicted to small windows with more bricks in them than glass, and we are not over-fanciful in the way of decorative architecture, and we get unexpected sea-views through cracks in the street doors; on the whole, however, we are snug and comfortable and well accommodated. But the home secretary (if there be such an officer) cannot too soon shut up the burial-ground of the old parish church. It is in the midst of us, and Pavilionstone will get no good of it if it be too long left alone.

The lion of Pavilionstone is its great hotel. A dozen years ago, going over to Paris by Southeastern Tidal Steamer, you used to be dropped upon the platform of the main line, Pavilionstone station (not a junction then) at eleven o'clock on a dark winter's night in a roaring wind; and in the howling wilderness outside the station, was a short omnibus which brought you up by the forehead the instant you got in at the door; and nobody cared about you and you were alone in the world. You bumped over infinite chalk until you were turned out at a strange building which had just left off being a barn without having quite begun to be a house, where nobody expected your coming, or knew what to do with you when you were come, and where you were usually blown about, until you happen to be blown against the cold beef and finally into bed. At five in the morning you were blown out of bed, and after a dreary breakfast with crumpled company, in the midst of confusion, were hustled on board a steamboat and lay wretched on deck until you saw France lunging and surging at you with great vehemence over the bowsprit.

Now, you come down to Pavilionstone in a free and easy manner, an irresponsible agent, made over in trust to the Southeastern Company, until you get out of the railway carriage at high-water mark. If you are crossing by the boat at once, you have nothing to do but walk on board and be happy there if you can—I can't. If you are going to our great Pavilionstone hotel the sprightliest porters under the sun, whose cheerful looks are a pleasant welcome, shoulder your luggage, drive it off in vans, bowl it away in trucks, and enjoy themselves in playing athletic games with it. If you are for public life at our great Pavilionstone hotel, you walk into that establishment as if it were your club; and find ready for you your news-room, dining-room, smoking-room, billiard-room, music-room, public breakfast, public dinner twice a day (one plain, one gorgeous), hot baths and cold baths. If you want to be bored there are plenty of bores always ready for you, and from Saturday to Monday in particular you can be bored (if you like it) through and through. Should you want to be private at our great Pavilionstone hotel, say but the word, look at the list of charges, choose your floor, name your figure—there you are established in your castle by the day, week, month or year, innocent of all comers or goers, unless you have my fancy for walking early in the morning down the groves of boots and shoes, which so regularly flourish at all the chamber-doors before breakfast, that it seems to me as if nobody ever got up or took them in. Are you going across the Alps, and would you like to air your Italian at our great Pavilionstone hotel? Talk to the manager—always conversational, accomplished, and polite. Do you want to be aided, abetted, comforted, or advised, at our great Pavilionstone hotel? Send for the good landlord and he is your friend. Should you or any one belonging to you ever be taken ill at our great Pavilionstone hotel you will not soon forget him or his kind wife.

And when you pay your bill at our great Pavilionstone hotel, you will not be put out of humor by anything you find in it.

A thoroughly good inn in the days of coaching and posting was a noble place. But no such inn would have been equal to the reception of four or five hundred people, all of them wet through, and half of them dead sick, every day in the year. This is where we shine in our Pavilionstone hotel. Again—who, coming and going, pitching and tossing, boating and training, hurrying in, and flying out, could ever have calculated the fees to be paid at an old-fashioned house? In our Pavilionstone hotel vocabulary there is no such word as fee. Everything is done for you; every service is provided at a fixed and reasonable charge; all the prices are hung up in all the rooms; and you can make out your own bill beforehand as well as the book-keeper.

In the case of your being a pictorial artist, desirous of studying at small expense the physiognomies and beards of different nations, come on receipt of this to Pavilionstone. You shall find all the nations of the earth and all the styles of shaving and not shaving, hair cutting and hair letting alone, forever flowing through our hotel. Couriers you shall see by hundreds; fat leathern bags for five-franc pieces, closing with violent snaps like discharges of fire-arms by thousands; more luggage in a morning than fifty years ago all Europe saw in a week. Looking at trains, steamboats, sick travelers, and luggage, is our great Pavilionstone recreation. We are not strong in other public amusements. We have a literary and scientific institution, and we have a Working Men's Institution—may it hold many gypsy holidays in summer fields with the kettle boiling, the band of music playing, and the people dancing; and may I be on the hillside looking on with pleasure at a wholesome sight too rare in England!—and we have two or three churches, and more chapels than I have yet added up. But public amusements are scarce with us. If a poor theatrical manager comes with his company to give us in a loft, Mary Bax, or the Murder on the Sand Hills, we don't care much for him—starve him out in fact. We take more kindly to wax-work, especially if it moves; in which case it keeps much clearer of the second commandment than when it is still. Cooke's Circus (Mr. Cooke is my friend, and always leaves a good name behind him) gives us only a night in passing through. Nor does the traveling menagerie think us worth a longer visit. It gave us a look in the other day, bringing with it the residentiary van with the stained glass windows, which her majesty kept ready-made at Windsor Castle, until she found a suitable opportunity of submitting it for the proprietor's acceptance. I brought away five wonderments from this exhibition. I have wondered ever since whether the beasts ever do get used to those small places of confinement; whether the monkeys have the very horrible flavor in their free state; whether wild animals have a natural ear for time and tune, and therefore every four-footed creature began to howl in despair when the band began to play; what the giraffe does with his neck when his cart is shut up; and whether the elephant feels ashamed of himself when he is brought out of his den to stand on his head in the presence of the whole collection.

We are a tidal harbor at Pavilionstone, as indeed I have implied already in my mention of tidal trains. At low water we are a heap of mud with an empty channel in it where a couple of men in big boots always shovel and scoop: with what exact object I am unable to say. At that time all the stranded fishing-boats turn over on their sides as if they were dead marine monsters; the colliers and other shipping stick disconsolate in the mud; the steamers look as if their white chimneys would never smoke more, and their red paddles never turn again; the green sea-slime and weed upon the rough stones at the entrance seem records of obsolete high tides never more to flow; the flagstaff-halyards droop; the very little wooden lighthouse shrinks in the idle glare of the sun. And here I may observe of the very little wooden lighthouse, that when it is lighted at night—red and green—it looks so like a medical man's, that several distracted husbands have at various times been found, on occasions of premature domestic anxiety, going round and round it, trying to find the nightbell.

But the moment the tide begins to make, the Pavilionstone harbor begins to revive. It feels the breeze of the rising water before the water comes, and begins to flutter and stir. When the little shallow waves creep in, barely overlapping one another, the vanes at the mastheads wake and become agitated. As the tide rises the fishing-boats get into good spirits and dance, the flagstaff hoists a bright red flag, the steamboat smokes, cranes creak, horses and carriages dangle in the air, stray passengers and luggage appear. Now, the shipping is afloat and comes up buoyantly to look at the wharf. Now, the carts that have come down for coals load away as hard as they can load. Now the steamer smokes immensely, and occasionally blows at the paddle-boxes like a vaporous whale—greatly disturbing nervous loungers. Now, both the tide and the breeze have risen, and you are holding your hat on (if you want to see how the ladies hold their hats on, with a stay passing over the broad brim and down the nose, come to Pavilionstone). Now, everything in the harbor splashes, dashes, and bobs. Now, the Down Tidal Train is telegraphed, and you know (without knowing how you know) that two hundred and eighty-seven people are coming. Now, the fishing boats that have been out sailing at the top of the tide. Now, the bell goes and the locomotive hisses and shrieks, and the train comes gliding in, and two hundred and eighty-seven come scuffling out. Now, there is not only a tide of water, but a tide of people, and a tide of luggage—all tumbling and flowing and bouncing about together. Now, after infinite bustle the steamer steams out and we (on the pier) are all delighted when she rolls as if she would roll her funnel out, and are all disappointed when she don't. Now, the other steamer is coming in, and the custom-house prepares and the wharf-laborers assemble, and the hawsers are made ready, and the hotel porters come rattling down with van and truck, eager to begin more Olympic games with more luggage. And this is the way in which we go on down at Pavilionstone every tide. And if you want to live a life of luggage, or to see it lived, or to breathe sweet air which will send you to sleep at a moment's notice at any period of the day or night, or to disport yourself upon or in the sea, or to scamper about Kent, or to come out of town for the enjoyment of all or any of these pleasures, come to Pavilionstone.

OUT OF THE SEASON.

It fell to my lot this last bleak spring to find myself in a watering-place out of the season. A vicious northeast squall blew me into it from foreign parts, and I tarried in it alone for three days, resolved to be exceedingly busy.

On the first day I began business by looking for two hours at the sea and staring the foreign militia out of countenance. Having disposed of these important engagements I sat down at one of the two windows of my room intent on doing something desperate in the way of literary composition, and writing a chapter of unheard-of excellence—with which the present essay has no connection.

It is a remarkable quality in a watering-place out of the season, that everything in it will and must be looked at. I had no previous suspicion of this fatal truth; but the moment I sat down to write I began to perceive it. I had scarcely fallen into my most promising attitude and dipped my pen in the ink, when I found the clock upon the pier—a red-faced clock with a white rim—importuning me in a highly vexatious manner to consult my watch and see how I was off for Greenwich time. Having no intention of making a voyage or taking an observation, I had not the least need of Greenwich time, and could have put up with watering-place time as a sufficiently accurate article. The pier-clock, however, persisting, I felt it necessary to lay down my pen, compare my watch with him, and fall into a grave solicitude about half-seconds. I had taken up my pen again and was about to commence that valuable chapter, when a custom-house cutter under the window requested that I would hold a naval review of her immediately.

It was impossible under the circumstances for any mental resolution, merely human, to dismiss the custom-house cutter, because the shadow of her topmast fell upon my paper, and the vane played on the masterly blank chapter. I was therefore under the necessity of going to the other window; sitting astride of the chair there like Napoleon bivouacking in the print; and inspecting the cutter as she lay all, Oh! that day, in the way of my chapter. She was rigged to carry a quantity of canvas, but her hull was so very small that four giants aboard of her (three men and a boy) who were vigilantly scraping at her all together, inspired me with a terror lest they should scrape her away. A fifth giant who appeared to consider himself "below"—as indeed he was from the waist downward—meditated in such close proximity with the little gusty chimney-pipe, that he seemed to be smoking it. Several boys looked on from the wharf, and when the gigantic attention appeared to be fully occupied, one or other of these would furtively swing himself in midair over the custom-house cutter, by means of a line pendant from her rigging like a young spirit of the storm. Presently a sixth hand brought down two little water-casks; presently afterward a truck came and delivered a hamper. I was now under an obligation to consider that the cutter was going on a cruise, and to wonder where she was going, and when she was going, and why she was going, and at what date she might be expected back, and who commanded her? With these pressing questions I was fully occupied when the packet, making ready to go across and blowing off her spare steam roared: "Look at me!"

It became a positive duty to look at the packet preparing to go across; aboard of which the people newly come down by the railroad were hurrying in a great fluster. The crew had got their tarry overalls on—and one knew what that meant—not to mention the white basins, ranged in neat little piles of a dozen each, behind the door of the after-cabin. One lady as I looked, one resigning and far-seeing woman, took her basin from the store of crockery as she might have taken a refreshment-ticket, laid herself down on deck with that utensil at her ear, muffled her feet in one shawl, solemnly covered her countenance after the antique manner with another, and on the completion of these preparations appeared by the strength of her volition to become insensible. The mail-bags (Oh, that I myself had the sea-legs of a mail-bag!) were tumbled aboard; the packet left off roaring, warped out, and made at the white line upon the bar. One dip, one roll, one break of the sea over her bows, and Moore's Almanac or the sage Raphael could not have told me more of the state of things aboard than I knew.

The famous chapter was all but begun now and would have been begun but for the wind. It was blowing stiffly from the east, and it rumbled in the chimney and shook the house. That was not much; but looking out into the wind's gray eye for inspiration, I laid down my pen again to make the remark to myself, how emphatically everything by the sea declares that it has a great concern in the state of the wind. The trees blown all one way; the defenses of the harbor reared highest and strongest against the raging point; the shingle flung up on the beach from the same direction; the number of arrows pointed at the common enemy; the sea tumbling in and rushing toward them as if it were inflamed by the sight. This put it in my head that I really ought to go out and take a walk in the wind; so I gave up the magnificent chapter for that day, entirely persuading myself that I was under a moral obligation to have a blow.

I had a good one and that on the high-road—the very high-road—on the top of the cliffs where I met the stage-coach with all the outsides holding their hats on and themselves too, and overtook a flock of sheep with the wool about their necks blown into such great ruffs that they looked like fleecy owls. The wind played upon the lighthouse as if it were a great whistle, the spray was driven over the sea in a cloud of haze, the ships rolled and pitched heavily, and at intervals long slants and flaws of light made mountain-steeps of communication between the ocean and the sky. A walk of ten miles brought me to a seaside town without a cliff, which like the town I had come from was out of the season too. Half of the houses were shut up; half of the other half were to let; the town might have done as much business as it was doing then if it had been at the bottom of the sea. Nobody seemed to flourish save the attorney; his clerk's pen was going in the bow-window of his wooden house; his brass door-plate alone was free from salt, and had been polished up that morning. On the beach among the rough luggers and capstans groups of storm-beaten boatmen like a sort of marine monsters, watched under the lee of those objects, or stood leaning forward against the wind, looking out through battered spy-glasses. The parlor-bell in the Admiral Benbow had grown so flat with being out of the season that neither could I hear it ring when I pulled the handle for lunch, nor could the young woman in black stockings and strong shoes, who acted as waiter out of the season, until it had been tinkled three times.

Admiral Benbow's cheese was out of the season, but his home-made bread was good and his beer was perfect. Deluded by some earlier spring day which had been warm and sunny, the admiral had cleared the firing out of his parlor stove, and had put some flower-pots in—which was amiable and hopeful in the admiral, but not judicious: the room being at that present visiting transcendantly cold. I therefore took the liberty of peeping out across a little stone passage into the admiral's kitchen, and seeing a high settle with its back toward me drawn out in front of the admiral's kitchen fire I strolled in, bread and cheese in hand, munching and looking about. One landsman and two boatmen were seated on the settle, smoking pipes and drinking beer out of thick pint crockery mugs—mugs peculiar to such places, with parti-colored rings round them and ornamented between the rings like frayed-out roots. The landsman was relating his experience, as yet only three nights old, of a fearful running-down case in the Channel, and therein presented to my imagination a sound of music that it will not soon forget.

"At that identical moment of time," said he (he was a prosy man by nature who rose with his subject), "the night being light and calm, but with a gray mist upon the water that didn't seem to spread for more than two or three mile, I was walking up and down the wooden causeway next the pier, off where it happened, along with a friend of mine, which his name is Mr. Clocker. Mr. Clocker is a grocer over yonder." (From the direction in which he pointed the bowl of his pipe, I might have judged Mr. Crocker to be a merman established in the grocery trade in twenty-five fathoms of water.) "We were smoking our pipes and walking up and down the causeway, talking of one thing and talking of another. We were quite alone there except that a few hovelers" (the Kentish name for 'long-shore boatmen like his companions) "were hanging about their lugs waiting while the tide made as hovellers will." (One of the two boatmen thoughtfully regarding me, shut up one eye; this I understood to mean: first, that he took me into the conversation: secondly, that he confirmed the proposition: thirdly, that he announced himself as a hoveller.) "All of a sudden Mr. Clocker and me stood rooted to the spot by hearing a sound come through the stillness right over the sea, like a great sorrowful flute or æolian harp. We didn't in the least know what it was, and judge of our surprise when we saw the hovellers to a man leap into the boats and tear about to hoist sail and get off, as if they had every one of 'em gone in a moment raving mad! But they knew it was the cry of distress from the sinking emigrant ship."

When I got back to my watering-place out of the season, and had done my twenty miles in good style, I found that the celebrated black mesmerist intended favoring the public that evening in the Hall of the Muses, which he had engaged for the purpose. After a good dinner seated by the fire in an easy-chair, I began to waver in a design I had formed of waiting on the black mesmerist, and to incline toward the expediency of remaining where I was. Indeed a point of gallantry was involved in my doing so, inasmuch as I had not left France alone, but had come from the prisons of St. Pélagie with my distinguished and unfortunate friend Madam Roland (in two volumes which I bought for two francs each at the bookstall in the Place de la Concorde, Paris, at the corner of the Rue Royale). Deciding to pass the evening *tête-à-tête* with Madam Roland, I derived, as I always do, great pleasure from that spiritual woman's society and the charms of her brave soul and engaging conversation. I must confess that if she had only some more faults, only a few more passionate failings of any kind, I might love her better; but I am content to believe that the deficiency is in me and not in her. We spent some sadly interesting hours together on this occasion, and she told me again of her cruel discharge from the Abbaye, and of her being rearrested before her free feet had sprung lightly up half a dozen steps of her own staircase, and carried off to the prison which she only left for the guillotine.

Madam Roland and I took leave of one another before midnight, and I went to bed full of vast intentions for next day in connection with the unparalleled chapter. To hear the foreign mail-steamers coming in at dawn of day, and to know that I was not aboard or obliged to get up, was very comfortable; so I rose for the chapter in great force.

I had advanced so far as to sit down at my window again on my second morning, and to write the first half-line of the chapter and strike it out, not liking it, when my conscience reproached me with not having surveyed the watering-place out of the season after all yesterday, but with having gone straight out of it at the rate of four miles and a half an hour. Obviously the best amends that I could make for this remissness was to go and look at it without another moment's delay. So altogether as a matter of duty—I gave up the magnificent chapter for another day, and sauntered out with my hands in my pockets.

All the houses and lodgings ever let to visitors were to let that morning. It seemed to have snowed bills with to let upon them. This put me thinking what the owners of all those apartments did out of season; how they employed their time and occupied their minds. They could not be always going to the Methodist chapels, of which I passed one every other minute. They must have some other recreation. Whether they pretended to take one another's lodgings, and opened one another's tea-caddies in fun? Whether they cut slices off their own beef and mutton, and made believe that it belonged to somebody else? Whether they played little dramas of life as children do and said, "I ought to come and look at your apartments, and you ought to ask two guineas a week too much, and then I ought to say I must have the rest of the day to think of it, and then you ought to say that another lady and gentleman with no children in family had made an offer very close to your own terms, and you had passed your word to give them a positive answer in half an hour, and indeed were just going to take the bill down when you heard the knock, and then I ought to take them, you know?" Twenty such speculations engaged my thoughts. Then after passing, still clinging to the walls, defaced rags of the bills of last year's circus, I came to a back field near a timber-yard where the circus itself had been, and where there was yet a sort of monkish tonsure on the grass, indicating the spot where the young lady had gone round upon her pet steed Firefly in her daring flight. Turning into the town again I came among the shops, and they were emphatically out of the season. The chemist had no boxes of ginger-beer powders, no beautifying sea-side soaps and washes, no attractive scents; nothing but his great goggle-eyed red bottles, looking as if the winds of winter and the drift of the salt-sea had inflamed them. The grocers' hot pickles, Harvey's sauce, Dr. Kitchener's zest, anchovy paste, Dundee marmalade, and the whole stock of luxurious helps to appetite were hibernating somewhere underground. The china-shop had no trifles from anywhere. The bazaar had given in altogether, and presented a notice on the shutters that this establishment would reopen at Whitsuntide, and that the proprietor in the meantime might be heard of at Wild Lodge, East Cliff. At the sea-bathing establishment a row of neat little wooden houses seven or eight feet high, I saw the proprietor in bed in the shower bath. As to the bathing-machines they were (how they got there is not for me to say) at the top of a hill at least a mile and a half off. The library which I had never seen otherwise than wide open was tight shut; and two peevish bald old gentlemen seemed to be hermetically sealed up inside eternally reading the paper. That wonderful mystery, the music-shop, carried it off as usual (except that it had more cabinet pianos in stock), as if season or no season were all one to it. It made the same prodigious display of bright brazen wind-instruments, horribly twisted, worth, as I should conceive, some thousands of pounds, and which it is utterly impossible that anybody in any season can ever play or want to play. It had five triangles in the window, six pairs of castanets, and three harps; likewise every polka with a colored frontispiece that ever was published; from the original one where a smooth male and female Pole of high rank are coming at the observer with their arms a-kimbo to the ratcatcher's daughter. Astonishing establishment, amazing enigma! Three other shops were pretty much out of the season, what they were used to be in it. First, the shop where they sell the sailors' watches, which had still the old collection of enormous timekeepers, apparently designed to break a fall from the masthead: with places to wind them up like fire-plugs. Secondly, the shop where they sell the sailors' clothing, which displayed the old sou'westers, and the old oily suits, and the old pea-jackets, and the old one sea-chest, with its handles like a pair of rope ear-rings. Thirdly, the unchangeable shop for the sale of literature that has been left behind. Here Dr. Faustus was still going down to very red and yellow perdition, under the superintendence of three green personages of a scaly humor, with excrescential serpents growing out of their blade-bones. Here the Golden Dreamer, and the Norwood Fortune Teller, were still on sale at sixpence each, with instructions for making the dumb cake, and reading destinies in tea-cups, and with a picture of a young woman with a high waist lying on a sofa in an attitude so uncomfortable as almost to account for her dreaming at one and the same time of a conflagration, a shipwreck, an earthquake, a skeleton, a church-porch, lightning, funerals performed, and a young man in a bright blue coat and canary pantaloons. Here were little warblers and Fairburn's comic songsters. Here, too, were ballads on the old ballad paper and in the old confusion of types; with an old man in a cocked hat and an arm-chair, for the illustration to Will Wath the bold smuggler; and the Friar of Orders Grey, represented by a little girl in a hoop with a ship in the distance. All these as of yore when they were infinite delights to me!

It took me so long fully to relish these many enjoyments that I had not more than an hour before bedtime to devote to Madam Roland. We got on admirably together on the subject of her convent education, and I rose next morning with the full conviction that the day for the great chapter was at last arrived.

It had fallen calm, however, in the night, and as I sat at breakfast I blushed to remember that I had not yet been on the Downs. I a walker and not yet on the Downs! Really on so quiet and bright a morning this must be set right. As an essential part of the whole duty of man, therefore, I left the chapter to itself—for the present—and went on the Downs. They were wonderfully green and beautiful, and gave me a good deal to do. When I had done with the free air and the view I had to go down into the valley and look after the hops (which I know nothing about), and to be equally solicitous as to the cherry orchards. Then I took it on myself to cross-examine a tramping family in black (mother alleged, I have no doubt by herself in person, to have died last week), and to accompany eighteen-pence which produced a great effect with moral admonitions which produced none at all. Finally, it was late in the afternoon before I got back to the unprecedented chapter, and then I determined that it was out of the season as the place was and put it away.

I went at night to the benefit of Mrs. B. Wedgington at the theater, who had placarded the town with the admonition: "Don't forget it!" I made the house, according to my calculation, four and ninepence to begin with, and it may have warmed up in the course of the evening to half a sovereign. There was nothing to offend any one—the good Mr. Baines, of Leeds, excepted. Mrs. B. Wedgington, sang to a grand piano. Mr. B. Wedgington did the like, and also took off his coat, tucked up his trousers, and danced in clogs. Master B. Wedgington, aged ten months, was nursed by a shivering young person in the boxes, and the eye of Mrs. B. Wedgington wandered that way more than once. Peace be with all the Wedgingtons from A. to Z. May they find themselves in the season somewhere!

A POOR MAN'S TALE OF A PATENT.

I AM not used to writing for print. What workingman that never labors less (some Mondays, and Christmas time and Easter time excepted) than twelve or fourteen hours a day is? But I have been asked to put down plain what I have got to say; and so I take pen and ink and do it to the best of my power, hoping defects will find excuse.

I was born nigh London, but have worked in a shop at Birmingham (what you would call manufactories we call shops), almost ever since I was out of my time. I served my apprenticeship at Deptford, nigh where I was born, and I am a smith by trade. My name is John. I have been called "Old John" ever since I was nineteen years of age on account of not having much hair. I am fifty-six year of age at the present time, and I don't find myself with more hair nor yet with less to signify, than at nineteen year of age aforesaid.

I have been married thirty-five year, come next April. I was married on All Fool's Day. Let them laugh that win. I won a good wife that day, and it was as sensible a day to me as ever I had.

We have had a matter of ten children, six thereof are living. My eldest son is engineer in the Italian steam-packet "Mezzo Giorno," plying between Marseilles and Naples, and calling at Genoa, Leghorn, and Civita Vecchia." He was a good workman. He invented a many useful little things that brought him in—nothing. I have two sons doing well at Sydney, New South Wales—single when last heard from. One of my sons (James) went wild and for a soldier, where he was shot in India, living six weeks in hospital with a musket-ball lodged in his shoulder-blade, which he wrote with his own hand. He was the best looking. One of my two daughters (Mary) is comfortable in her circumstances, but water on the chest. The other (Charlotte), her husband ran away from her in the basest manner, and she and her three children live with us. The youngest, six year old, has a turn for mechanics.

I am not a Chartist and I never was. I don't mean to say but what I see a good many public points to complain of, still I don't think that's the way to set them right. If I did think so I should be a Chartist. But I don't think so and I am not a Chartist. I read the paper and hear discussion at what we call "a parlor," in Birmingham, and I know many good men and workmen who are Chartists. Note. Not physical force.

It won't be took as boastful in me if I make the remark (for I can't put down what I have got to say, without putting that down before going any further), that I have always been of an ingenious turn. I once got £20 by a screw and it's in use now. I have been twenty year off and on, completing an invention and perfecting it. I perfected of it last Christmas Eve at ten o'clock at night. Me and my wife stood and let some tears fall over the model, when it was done and I brought her in to take a look at it.

A friend of mine by the name of William Butcher, is a Chartist. Moderate. He is a good speaker. He is very animated. I have often heard him deliver that what is at every turn, in the way of us working-men is that too many places have been made in the course of time, to provide for people that never ought to have been provided for; and that we have to obey forms and to pay fees to support those places when we shouldn't ought. "True," (delivers William Butcher), "all the public has to do this, but it falls heaviest on the working-man, because he has least to spare; and likewise because impediments shouldn't be put in his way, when he wants redress of wrong or furtherance of right." Note. I have wrote down those words from William Butcher's own mouth. W. B. delivering them fresh for the aforesaid purpose.

Now, to my model again. There it was perfected of on Christmas Eve, gone nigh a year at ten o'clock at night. All the money I could spare I had laid out upon the model; and when times was bad, or my daughter Charlotte's children sickly, or both, it had stood still months at a spell. I had pulled it to pieces and made it over again with improvements I don't know how often. There it stood at last a perfected model as aforesaid.

William Butcher and me had a long talk Christmas Day respecting of the model. William is very sensible. But sometimes cranky. William said: "What will you do with it, John?" I said: "Patent it." William said: "How patent it, John?" I said: "By taking out a patent." William then delivered that the law of patent was a cruel wrong. William said, "John, if you make your invention public before you get a patent, any one may rob you of the fruits of your hard work. You are put in a cleft stick, John. Either you must drive a bargain very much against yourself by getting a party to come forward beforehand with the great expenses of the patent; or you must be put about from post to pillar among so many parties, trying to make a better bargain for yourself, and showing your invention, that your invention will be took from you over your head." I said: "William Butcher, are you cranky? You are sometimes cranky." William said, "No, John, I tell you the truth;" which he then delivered more at length. I said to W. B. I would patent the invention myself.

My wife's brother, George Bury, of West Bromwich, (his wife unfortunately took to drinking, made away with everything, and seventeen times committed to Birmingham Jail before happy release in every point of view), left my wife, his sister, when he died, a legacy of one hundred and twenty-eight pound ten, Bank of England Stocks. Me and my wife never broke into that money yet. Note. We might come to be old and past our work. We now agree to patent the invention. We said we would make a hole in it—I mean in the aforesaid money—and patent the invention. William Butcher wrote me a letter to Thomas Joy, in London. T. J. is a carpenter six foot four in height and plays quoits well. He lives in Chelsea, London, by the chucrh. I got leave from the shop, to be took on again when I come back. I am a good workman. Not a teetotaller; but never drunk. When the Christmas holidays were over, I went up to London by the Parliamentary train, and hired a lodging for a week with Thomas Joy. He is married. He has one son gone to sea.

Thomas Joy delivered (from a book he had) that the first step to be took, in patenting the invention, was to prepare a petition unto Queen Victoria. William Butcher had delivered similar, and drawn it up. Note. William is a ready writer. A declaration before a master in chancery was to be added to it. That we likewise drew up. After a deal of trouble I found out a master, in Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane, nigh Temple Bar, where I made the declaration, and paid eighteenpence. I was told to take the declaration and petition to the home office, in Whitehall, where I left it to be signed by the home secretary (after I had found the office out), and where I paid two pound, two, and sixpence. In six days he signed it, and I was told to take it to the attorney-general's chambers and leave it there for a report. I did so, and paid four pound, four. Note. Nobody all through, ever thankful for their money, but all uncivil.

My lodging at Thomas Joy's was now hired for another week, whereof five days were gone. The attorney-general made what they called a report-of-course (my invention being, as William Butcher had delivered before starting, unopposed), and I was sent back with it to the home office. They made a copy of it, which was called a warrant. For this warrant I paid seven pounds, thirteen, and six. It was sent to the queen to sign. The queen sent it back signed. The home secretary signed it again. The gentleman throwed it at me when I called and said: "Now take it to the patent office in Lincoln's Inn." I was then in my third week at Thomas Joy's, living very sparing, on account of fees. I found myself losing heart.

At the patent office in Lincoln's Inn, they made "a draft of the queen's bill," of my invention, and a "docket of the bill." I paid five pound, ten, and six, for this. They "engrossed two copies of the bill; one for the signet office, and one for the privy-seal office." I paid one pound, seven, and six, for this. Stamp duty over and above, three pounds. The engrossing clerk of the same office engrossed the queen's bill for signature. I paid him one pound, one. Stamp duty, again, one pound, ten. I was next to take the queen's bill to the attorney-general again, and get it signed again. I took it, and paid five pound more. I fetched it away, and took it to the home secretary again. He sent it to the queen again. She signed it again. I paid seven pound, thirteen, and six, more, for this. I had been over a month at Thomas Joy's. I was quite wore out, patience and pocket.

Thomas Joy delivered all this, as it went on, to William Butcher. William Butcher delivered it again to three Birmingham Parlors, from which it got to all the other parlors, and was took, as I have been told since, right through all the shops in the North of England. Note. William Butcher delivered, at his parlor, in a speech, that it was a patent way of making Chartists.

But I hadn't nigh done yet. The queen's bill was to be took to the signet office in Somerset House, Strand—where the stamp shop is. The clerk of the signet made "a signet bill for the lord keeper of the privy seal." I paid him four pound, seven. The clerk of the lord keeper of the privy seal made "a privy seal bill for the lord chancellor." I paid him, four pound, two. The privy-seal bill was handed over to the clerk of the patents, who engrossed the aforesaid. I paid him, five pound, seventeen, and eight; at the same time, I paid stamp-duty for the patent, in one lump, thirty pound. I next paid for "boxes for the patent," nine and sixpence. Note. Thomas Joy would have made the same at a profit for eighteen-pence. I next paid "fees to the deputy, the lord chancellor's purse-bearer," two pound, two. I next paid "fees to the clerk of the Hanaper," seven pound, thirteen. I next paid "fees to the deputy clerk of the Hanaper," ten shillings. I next paid, to the lord chancellor again, one pound, eleven, and six. Last of all, I paid "fees to the deputy sealer, and deputy chaff-wax," ten shillings and sixpence. I had lodged at Thomas Joy's over six weeks, and the unopposed patent for my invention, for England only, had cost me ninety-six pound, seven, and eightpence. If I had taken it out for the United Kingdom, it would have cost me more than three hundred pounds.

Now, teaching had not come up but very limited when I was young. So much the worse for me, you'll say. I say the same. William Butcher is twenty year younger than me. He knows a hundred year more. If William Butcher had wanted to patent an invention, he might have been sharper than myself when hustled backward among all those offices, though I doubt if so patient. Note. William being sometimes cranky, and consider porters, messengers, and clerks.

Thereby I say nothing of my being tired of my life, while I was patenting my invention. But I put this: Is it reasonable to make a man feel as if, in inventing an ingenious improvement meant to do good, he had done something wrong? How else can a man feel when he is met by such difficulties at every turn? All inventors taking out a patent must feel so. And look at the expense. How hard on me, and how hard on the country if there's any merit in me (and my invention is took up now, I am thankful to say, and doing well), to put me to all that expense before I can move a finger! Make the addition yourself, and it'll come to ninety-six pound, seven, and eightpence. No more, and no less.

What can I say against William Butcher, about places? Look at the home secretary, the attorney-general, the patent office, the engrossing clerk, the lord chancellor, the privy seal, the clerk of the patents, the lord chancellor's purse-bearer, the clerk of the Hanaper, the deputy clerk of the Hanaper, the deputy sealer, and the deputy chaff-wax. No man in England could get a patent for an Indian-rubber band, or an iron-hoop, without feeing all of them. Some of them, over and over again. I went through thirty-five stages. I began with the queen upon the throne. I ended with the deputy chaff-wax. Note. I should like to see the deputy chaff-wax. Is it a man or what is it?

What I had to tell, I have told. I have wrote it down. I hope it's plain. Not so much in the handwriting (though nothing to boast of there), as in the sense of it. I will now conclude with Thomas Joy. Thomas said to me, when we parted, "John, if the laws of this country were as honest as they ought to be, you would have come to London—registered an exact description and drawing of your invention—paid half a crown or so for doing of it—and therein and thereby have got your patent."

My opinion is the same as Thomas Joy. Further. In William Butcher's delivering "that the whole gang of Hanapers and chaff-waxes must be done away with, and that England has been chaffed and waxed sufficient," I agree.

THE NOBLE SAVAGE.

To come to the point at once, I beg to say that I have not the least belief in the Noble Savage. I consider him a prodigious nuisance, and an enormous superstition. His calling rum fire-water, and me a pale face, wholly fail to reconcile me to him. I don't care what he calls me. I call him a savage, and I call a savage a something highly desirable to be civilized off the face of the earth. I think a mere gent (which I take to be the lowest form of civilization) better than a howling, whistling, clucking, stamping, jumping, tearing savage. It is all one to me, whether he sticks a fish-bone through his visage, or bits of trees through the lobes of his ears, or birds' feathers in his head; whether he flattens his hair between two boards, or spreads his nose over the breadth of his face, or drags his lower lip down by great weights, or blackens his teeth, or knocks them out, or paints one cheek red and the other blue, or tattoos himself, or oils himself, or rubs his body with fat, or crimps it with knives. Yielding to whichsoever of these agreeable eccentricities, he is a savage—cruel, false, thievish, murderous; addicted more or less to grease, entrails, and beastly customs; a wild animal with the questionable gift of boasting; a conceited, tiresome, bloodthirsty, monotonous humbug.

Yet it is extraordinary to observe how some people will talk about him, as they talk about the good old times; how they will regret his disappearance, in the course of this world's development, from such and such lands where his absence is a blessed relief and an indispensable preparation for the sowing of the very first seeds of any influence that can exalt humanity; how, even with the evidence of himself before them, they will either be determined to believe, or will suffer themselves to be persuaded into believing, that he is something which their five senses tell them he is not.

There was Mr. Catlin, some few years ago, with his Ojibbeway Indians. Mr. Catlin was an energetic, earnest man, who had lived among more tribes of Indians than I need reckon up here, and who had written a picturesque and glowing book about them. With his party of Indians squatting and spitting on the table before him, or dancing their miserable jigs after their own dreary manner, he called, in all good faith, upon his civilized audience to take notice of their symmetry and grace, their perfect limbs, and the exquisite expression of their pantomime; and his civilized audience, in all good faith, complied and admired. Whereas, as mere animals, they were wretched creatures, very low in the scale and very poorly formed; and as men and women possessing any power of truthful dramatic expression by means of action, they were no better than the chorus at an Italian opera in England—and would have been worse if such a thing were possible.

Mine are no new views of the noble savage. The greatest writers on natural history found him out long ago. Buffon knew what he was, and showed why he is the sulky tyrant that he is to his women, and how it happens (Heaven be praised!) that his race is spare in numbers. For evidence of the quality of his moral nature, pass himself for a moment and refer to his "faithful dog." Has he ever improved a dog, or attached a dog, since his nobility first ran wild in woods, and was brought down (at a very long shot) by Pope? Or does the animal that is the friend of man always degenerate in his low society?

It is not the miserable nature of the noble savage that is the new thing; it is the whimpering over him with maudlin admiration, and the affecting to regret him, and the drawing of any comparison of advantage between the blemishes of civilization and the tenor of his swinish life. There may have been a change now and then in those diseased absurdities, but there is none in him.

Think of the Bushmen. Think of the two men and the two women who have been exhibited about England for some years. Are the majority of persons—who remember the horrid little leader of that party in his festering bundle of hides, with his filth and his antipathy to water, and his straddled legs, and his odious eyes shaded by his brutal hand, and his cry of "Qu-u-u-u-aaa!" (Bosjesman for something desperately insulting I have no doubt)—conscious of an affectionate yearning toward that noble savage, or is it idiosyncratic in me to abhor, detest, abominate, and abjure him? I have no reserve on this subject, and will frankly state that, setting aside that stage of the entertainment when he counterfeited the death of some creature he had shot, by laying his head on his hand and shaking his left leg—at which time I think it would have been justifiable homicide to slay him—I have never seen that group sleeping, smoking, and expectorating round their brazier, but I have sincerely desired that something might happen to the charcoal smoldering therein, which would cause the immediate suffocation of the whole of the noble strangers.

There is at present a party of Zulu Kaffirs exhibiting at the St. George's Gallery, Hyde Park Corner, London. These noble savages are represented in a most agreeable manner; they are seen in an elegant theater, fitted with appropriate scenery of great beauty, and they are described in a very sensible and unpretending lecture, delivered with a modesty which is quite a pattern to all similar exponents. Though extremely ugly, they are much better shaped than such of their predecessors as I have referred to; and they are rather picturesque to the eye, though far from odoriferous to the nose. What a visitor left to his own interpretings and imaginings might suppose these noblemen to be about, when they give vent to that pantomimic expression which is quite settled to be the natural gift of the noble savage, I cannot possibly conceive; for it is so much too luminous for my personal civilization that it conveys no idea to my mind beyond a general stamping, ramping, and raving remarkable (as everything in savage life is) for its dire uniformity. But let us—with the interpreter's assistance, of which I for one stand so much in need—see what the noble savage does in Zulu Kaffir land.

The noble savage sets a king to reign over him, to whom he submits his life and limbs without a murmur or question, and whose whole life is passed chin deep in a lake of blood; but who, after killing incessantly, is in his turn killed by his relations and friends, the moment a gray hair appears on his head. All the noble savage's wars with his fellow-savages (and he takes no pleasure in anything else) are wars of extermination—which is the best thing I know of him, and the most comfortable to my mind when I look at him. He has no moral feelings of any kind, sort, or description; and his "mission" may be summed up as simply diabolical.

The ceremonies with which he faintly diversifies his life are, of course, of a kindred nature. If he wants a wife he appears before the kennel of the gentleman whom he has selected for his father-in-law, attended by a party of male friends of a very strong flavor, who screech and whistle and stamp an offer of so many cows for the young lady's hand. The chosen father-in-law—also supported by a high-flavored party of male friends—screeches, whistles, and yells (being seated on the ground he can't stamp) that there never was such a daughter in the market as his daughter, and that he must have six more cows. The son-in-law and his select circle of backers screech, whistle, stamp, and yell in reply that they will give three more cows. The father-in law (an old deluder, overpaid at the beginning) accepts four, and rises to bind the bargain. The whole party, the young lady included, then falling into epileptic convulsions, and screeching, whistling, stamping, and yelling together—and nobody taking any notice of the young lady (whose charms are not to be thought of without a shudder)—the noble savage is considered married, and his friends make demoniacal leaps at him by way of congratulation.

When the noble savage finds himself a little unwell, and mentions the circumstance to his friends, it is immediately perceived that he is under the influence of witchcraft. A learned personage, called an imyanger or witch doctor, is immediately sent for to nooker the umtargartie, or smell out the witch. The male inhabitants of the kraal being seated on the ground, the learned doctor, got up like a grizzly bear, appears, and administers a dance of a most terrific nature, during the exhibition of which remedy he incessantly gnashes his teeth and howls:—"I am the original physician to nooker the umtargartie. Yow yow yow! No connection with any other establishment. Till till till! All other umtargarties are feigned umtargarties, boroo boroo! but I perceive here a genuine and real umtargartie, hoosh hoosh hoosh! in whose blood I, the original imyanger and nookerer, blizzerum boo! will wash these bear's claws of mine. O yow yow yow!" All this time the learned physician is looking out among the attentive faces for some unfortunate man who owes him a cow, or who has given him any small offense, or against whom, without offense, he has conceived a spite. Him he never fails to nooker as the umtargartie, and he is instantly killed. In the absence of such an individual, the usual practice is to nooker the quietest and most gentlemanly person in company. But the nookering is invariably followed on the spot by the butchering.

Some of the noble savages in whom Mr. Catlin was so strongly interested, and the diminution of whose numbers, by rum and small-pox, greatly affected him, had a custom not unlike this, though much more appalling and disgusting in its odious details.

The women being at work in the fields, hoeing the Indian corn, and the noble savage being asleep in the shade, the chief has sometimes the condescension to come forth, and lighten the labor by looking at it. On these occasions, he seats himself in his own savage chair, and is attended by his shield bearer: who holds over his head a shield of cowhide—in shape like an immense mussel shell—fearfully and wonderfully, after the manner of a theatrical supernumerary. But lest the great man should forget his greatness in the contemplation of the humble works of agriculture, there suddenly rushes in a poet, retained for the purpose, called a praiser. This literary gentleman wears a leopard's head over his own, and a dress of tigers' tails, he has the appearance of having come express on his hind legs from the Zoological Gardens, and he incontinently strikes up the chief's praises, plunging and tearing all the while. There is a frantic wickedness in this brute's manner of worrying the air, and gnashing out, "Oh, what a delightful chief he is! Oh, what a delicious quantity of blood he sheds! Oh, how majestically he laps it up! Oh, how charmingly cruel he is! Oh, how he tears the flesh of his enemies and crunches the bones! Oh, how like the tiger and the leopard and the wolf and the bear he is! Oh, row row row row, how fond I am of him!" which might tempt the Society of Friends to charge at a hand-gallop into the Swartz-Kop location and exterminate the whole kraal.

When war is afoot among the noble savages—which is always—the chief holds a council to ascertain whether it is the opinion of his brothers and friends in general that the enemy shall be exterminated. On this occasion, after the performance of an Umsebeuza, or war song—which is exactly like all the other songs—the chief makes a speech to his brothers and friends, arranged in single file. No particular order is observed during the delivery of this address, but every gentleman who finds himself excited by the subject, instead of crying "Hear, hear!" as is the custom with us, darts from the rank and tramples out the life, or crushes the skull, or mashes the face, or scoops out the eyes, or breaks the limbs, or performs a whirlwind of atrocities on the body, of an imaginary enemy. Several gentleman becoming thus excited at once, and pounding away without the least regard to the orator, that illustrious person is rather in the position of an orator in an Irish House of Commons. But several of these scenes of savage life bear a strong generic resemblance to an Irish election, and I think would be extremely well received and understood at Cork.

In all these ceremonies the noble savage holds forth to the utmost possible extent about himself; from which to turn him to some civilized account we may learn, I think, that as egotism is one of the most offensive and contemptible littlenesses a civilized man can exhibit, so it is really incompatible with the interchange of ideas; inasmuch as if we all talked about ourselves we should soon have no listeners, and must be all yelling and screeching at once on our own separate accounts, making society hideous. It is my opinion that if we retained in us anything of the noble savage, we could not get rid of it too soon. But the fact is clearly otherwise. Upon the wife and dowry question, substituting coin for cows, we have assuredly nothing of the Zulu Kaffir left. The endurance of despotism is one great distinguishing mark of a savage always. The improving world has quite got the better of that too. In like manner, Paris is a civilized city, and the Théâtre Français a highly civilized theater; and we shall never hear, and never have heard in these later days (of course) of the praiser there. No, no, civilized poets have better work to do. As to nookering umtargarties, there are no pretended umtargarties in Europe and no European powers to nooker them; that would be mere spydom, subornation, small malice, superstition, and false pretense. And as to private umtargarties, are we not in the year eighteen hundred and fifty-three, with spirits rapping at our doors?

To conclude as I began. My position is, that if we have anything to learn from the Noble Savage, it is what to avoid. His virtues are a fable; his happiness is a delusion; his nobility, nonsense. We have no greater justification for being cruel to the miserable object than for being cruel to a William Shakespeare or an Isaac Newton; but he passes away before an immeasurably better and higher power than ever ran wild in any earthly woods, and the world will be all the better when his place knows him no more.

A FLIGHT.

WHEN Don Diego de—I forget his name—the inventor of the last new flying machines, price so many francs for ladies, so many more for gentlemen—when Don Diego, by permission of Deputy Chaff Wax and his noble band, shall have taken out a patent for the queen's dominions, and shall have opened a commodious warehouse in an airy situation; and when all persons of any gentility will keep at least a pair of wings, and be seen skimming about in every direction; I shall take a flight to Paris (as I soar round the world) in a cheap and independent manner. At present, my reliance is on the South Eastern Railway Company, in whose express train here I sit, at eight of the clock on a very hot morning, under the very hot roof of the terminus at London Bridge, in danger of being "forced" like a cucumber or a melon, or a pine-apple— And talking of pine-apples, I suppose there never were so many pine-apples in a Train as there appear to be in this train.

Whew! The hot-house air is faint with pine-apples. Every French citizen or citizeness is carrying pine-apples home. The compact little enchantress in the corner of my carriage (French actress, to whom I yielded up my heart under the auspices of that brave child, "Meat-Chell," at the St. James' Theater the night before last) has a pine-apple in her lap. Compact enchantress' friend confidante, mother, mystery, Heaven knows what, has two pine-apples in her lap, and a bundle of them under the seat. Tobacco-smoky Frenchman in Algerine wrapper, with peaked hood behind, who might be Abd-el Kader dyed rifle-green, and who seems to be dressed entirely in dirt and braid, carries pine-apples in a covered basket. Tall, grave, melancholy Frenchman, with black Vandyke beard, and hair close-cropped, with expansive chest to waistcoat, and compressive waist to coat: saturnine as to his pantaloons, calm as to his feminine boots, precious as to his jewelry, smooth and white as to his linen: dark-eyed, high foreheaded, hawk-nosed—got up, one thinks, like Lucifer or Mephistopheles, or Zamiel, transformed into a highly genteel Parisian—has the green end of a pine-apple sticking out of his neat valise.

Whew! If I were to be kept here long, under this forcing frame, I wonder what would become of me—whether I should be forced into a giant, or should sprout or blow into some other phenomenon! Compact Enchantress is not ruffled by the heat—she is always composed, always compact. O look at her little ribbons, frills, and edges, at her shawl, at her gloves, at her hair, at her bracelets, at her bonnet, at everything about her! How is it accomplished! What does she do to be so neat? How is it that every trifle she wears belongs to her, and cannot choose but be a part of her? And even Mystery, look at her! A model. Mystery not young, not pretty, though still of an average candle-light passability; but she does such miracles in her own behalf that one of these days, when she dies, they'll be amazed to find an old woman in her bed, distantly like her. She was an actress once, I shouldn't wonder, and had a mystery attendant on herself. Perhaps, Compact Enchantress will live to be a Mystery, and to wait with a shawl at the side-scenes, and to sit opposite to mademoiselle in railway carriages, and smile and talk subserviently, as Mystery does now. That's hard to believe!

Two Englishmen, and now our carriage is full. First Englishman, in the monied interest—flushed, highly respectable—Stock Exchange, perhaps—City, certainly. Faculties of second Englishman entirely absorbed in hurry. Plunges into the carriage, blind. Calls out of window concerning his luggage, deaf. Suffocates himself under pillows of great coats, for no reason, and in a demented manner. Will receive no assurance from any porter whatsoever. Is stout and hot, and wipes his head, and makes himself hotter by breathing so hard. Is totally incredulous respecting assurance of Collected Guard, that "there's no hurry." No hurry! And a flight to Paris in eleven hours!

It is all one to me in this drowsy corner, hurry or no hurry. Until Don Diego shall send home my wings, my flight is with the South Eastern Company. I can fly with the South Eastern, more lazily, at all events, than in the upper air. I have but to sit here thinking as idly as I please, and be whisked away. I am not accountable to anybody for the idleness of my thoughts in such an idle summer flight, my flight is provided for by the South Eastern and is no business of mine.

The bell! With all my heart. It does not require me to do so much as even to flap my wings. Something snorts for me, something shrieks for me, something proclaims to everything else that it had better keep out of my way—and away I go.

Ah! The fresh air is pleasant after the forcing-frame, though it does blow over these interminable streets, and scatter the smoke of this vast wilderness of chimneys. Here we are—no, I mean there we were, for it has darted far into the rear—in Bermondsey where the tanners live. Flash! The distant shipping in the Thames is gone. Whir! The little streets of new brick and red tile, with here and there a flag-staff growing like a tall weed out of the scarlet beans, and, everywhere, plenty of open sewer and ditch for the promotion of the public health, have been fired off in a volley. Whizz! Dust-heaps, market-gardens, and waste grounds. Rattle! New Cross Station. Shock! There we were at Croydon. Bur-r-r-r? The tunnel.

I wonder why it is that when I shut my eyes in a tunnel I begin to feel as if I were going at an express pace the other way. I am clearly going back to London now. Compact Enchantress must have forgotten something, and reversed the engine. No! After long darkness, pale fitful streaks of light appear. I am still flying on for Folkstone. The streaks grow stronger—become continuous—become the ghost of day—become the living day—became

I mean—the tunnel is miles and miles away, and here I fly through sunlight, all among the harvest and the Kentish hops.

There is a dreamy pleasure in this flying. I wonder where it was, and when it was, that we exploded, blew into space somehow, a Parliamentary train, with a crowd of heads and faces looking at us out of cages, and some hats waving. Monied Interest says it was at Reigate Station. Expounds to Mystery how Reigate Station is so many miles from London, which Mystery again develops to Compact Enchantress. There might be neither a Reigate nor a London for me, as I fly away among the Kentish hops and harvest. What do I care?

Bang! We have let another station off, and fly away regardless. Everything is flying. The hop-gardens turn gracefully toward me, presenting regular avenues of hops in rapid flight, then whirl away. So do the pools and rushes, haystacks, sheep, clover in full bloom delicious to the sight and smell, corn-sheaves, cherry-orchards, apple-orchards, reapers, gleaners, hedges, gates, fields that taper off into little angular corners, cottages, gardens, now and then a church. Bang, bang! A doubled-barreled station! Now a wood, now a bridge, now a landscape, now a cutting, now a—— Bang! a single-barreled station—there was a cricket-match somewhere with two white tents, and then four flying cows, then turnips—now the wires of the electric telegraph are all alive, and spin, and blur their edges, and go up and down, and make the intervals between each other most irregular; contracting and expanding in the strangest manner. Now we slacken. With a screwing, and a grinding, and a smell of water thrown on ashes, now we stop!

Demented Traveler, who has been for two or three minutes watchful, clutches his great-coats, plunges at the door, rattles it, cries "Hi!" eager to embark on board of impossible packets, far inland. Collected Guard appears. "Are you for Tunbridge, sir?" "Tunbridge? No. Paris." "Plenty of time, sir. No hurry. Five minutes here, sir, for refreshment." I am so blest (anticipating Zamiel, by half a second) as to procure a glass of water for Compact Enchantress.

Who would suppose we had been flying at such a rate, and shall take wing again directly? Refreshment-room full, platform full, porter with watering-pot deliberately cooling a hot wheel, another porter with equal deliberation helping the rest of the wheels bountifully to ice cream. Monied Interest and I reëntering the carriage first, and being there alone, he intimates to me that the French are "no go" as a nation. I ask why? He says, that Reign of Terror of theirs was quite enough. I ventured to inquire whether he remembers anything that preceded said Reign of Terror? He says not particularly. "Because," I remark, "the harvest that is reaped, has sometimes been sown." Monied Interest repeats, as quite enough for him, that the French are revolutionary—"and always at it."

Bell. Compact Enchantress, helped in by Zamiel, (whom the stars confound!) gives us her charming little side-box look, and smites me to the core. Mystery eating sponge-cake. Pine-apple atmosphere faintly tinged with suspicions of sherry. Demented Traveler flits past the carriage, looking for it. Is blind with agitation, and can't see it. Seems singled out by Destiny to be the only unhappy creature in the flight, who has any cause to hurry himself. Is nearly left behind. Is seized by Collected Guard after the train is in motion, and bundled in. Still his lingering suspicions that there must be a boat in the neighborhood, and will look wildly out of window for it.

Flight resumed. Corn-sheaves, hop-gardens, reapers, gleaners, apple-orchards, cherry-orchards, stations, single and double-barreled, Ashford. Compact Enchantress (constantly talking to Mystery, in an exquisite manner) gives a little scream; a sound that seems to come from high up in her precious little head; from behind her bright little eyebrows. "Great Heaven, my pine-apple! My angel! It is lost!" Mystery is desolated. A search made. It is not lost. Zamiel finds it. I curse him (flying) in the Persian manner. May his face be turned upside down, and jackasses sit upon his uncle's grave!

Now fresher air, now glimpses of uninclosed down-land with flapping crows flying over it whom we soon outfly, now the sea, now Folkestone at a quarter after ten. "Tickets ready, gentlemen!" Demented dashes at the door. "For Paris, sir?" No hurry.

Not the least. We are dropped slowly down to the port, and sidle to and fro (the whole train) before the insensible Royal George Hotel, for some ten minutes. The Royal

George takes no more heed of us than its namesake under water at Spithead, or under earth at Windsor, does. The Royal George's dog lies winking and blinking at us, without taking the trouble to sit up; and the Royal George's "wedding party" at the open window (who seem, I must say, rather tired of bliss) don't bestow a solitary glance upon us, flying thus to Paris in eleven hours. The first gentleman in Folkestone is evidently used up, on this subject.

Meanwhile, Demented chafes. Conceives that every man's hand is against him, and exerting itself to prevent his getting to Paris. Refuses consolation. Rattles door. Sees smoke on the horizon, and "knows" it's the boat gone without him. Monied Interest resentfully explains that he is going to Paris too. Demented signifies that if Monied Interest chooses to be left behind, he don't.

"Refreshments in the waiting-room, ladies and gentlemen. No hurry, ladies and gentlemen, for Paris. No hurry whatever!"

Twenty minutes' pause, by Folkestone clock, for looking at Enchantress while she eats a sandwich, and at Mystery while she eats of everything there that is eatable, from pork-pie, sausage, jam, and gooseberries, to lumps of sugar. All this time, there is a very waterfall of luggage, with a spray of dust, tumbling slantwise from the pier into the steamboat. All this time, Demented (who has no business with it) watches it with starting eyes, fiercely requiring to be shown his luggage. When it at last concludes the cataract, he rushes hotly to refresh—is shouted after, pursued, jostled, brought back, pitched into the departing steamer upside down, and caught by mariners disgracefully.

A lovely harvest day, a cloudless sky, a tranquil sea. The piston-rods of the engines so regularly coming up from below, to look (as well they may) at the bright weather, and so regularly almost knocking their iron heads against the cross beam of the skylight, and never doing it! Another Parisian actress is on board, attended by another Mystery. Compact Enchantress greets her sister artist—Oh, the Compact One's pretty teeth!—and Mystery greets Mystery. My Mystery soon ceases to be conversational—is taken poorly, in a word, having lunched too miscellaneously—and goes below. The remaining Mystery then smiles upon the sister artists (who, I am afraid, wouldn't greatly mind stabbing each other), and is upon the whole ravished.

And now I find that all the French people on board begin to grow, and all the English people to shrink. The French are nearing home, and shaking off a disadvantage, whereas we are shaking it on. Zamiel is the same man, and Abd-el-Kader is the same man, but each seems to come into possession of an indescribable confidence that departs from us—from Monied Interest, for instance, and from me. Just what they gain, we lose. Certain British "gents" about the steersman, intellectually nurtured at home on parody of everything and truth of nothing, become subdued, and in a manner forlorn; and when the steersman tells them (not exultingly) how he has "been upon this station now eight year, and never see the old town of Bullum yet," one of them, with an imbecile reliance on a reed, asks him what he considers to be the best hotel in Paris?

Now, I tread upon French ground, and am greeted by the three charming words, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, painted up (in letters a little too thin for their height) on the custom-house wall—also by the sight of large cocked hats, without which demonstrative head-gear nothing of a public nature can be done upon this soil. All the rabid hotel population of Boulogne howl and shriek outside a distant barrier, frantic to get at us. Demented, by some unlucky means peculiar to himself, is delivered over to their fury, and is presently seen struggling in a whirlpool of touters—is somehow understood to be going to Paris—is, with infinite noise, rescued by two cocked hats, and brought into custom-house bondage with the rest of us.

Here, I resign the active duties of life to an eager being, of preternatural sharpness, with a shelving forehead and a shabby snuff-colored coat, who (from the wharf) brought me down with his eye before the boat came into port. He darts upon my luggage, on the floor where all the luggage is strewn like a wreck at the bottom of the great deep; gets it proclaimed and weighed as the property of "Monsieur a traveler unknown;" pays certain francs for it, to a certain functionary behind a pigeon hole, like a pay-box at a theater (the arrangements in general are on a wholesale scale, half-military and half-theatrical); and I suppose I shall find it when I come to Paris—he says I shall. I know nothing about it, except that I pay him his small fee, and pocket the ticket he gives me, and sit upon a counter, involved in the general distraction.

Railway station. "Lunch or dinner, ladies and gentlemen. Plenty of time for Paris. Plenty of time!" Large hall, long counter, long strips of dining-table, bottles of wine, plates of meat, roast chickens, little loaves of bread, basins of soup, little caraffes of brandy, cakes, and fruit. Comfortably restored from these resources, I begin to fly again.

I saw Zamiel (before I took wing) presented to Compact Enchantress and sister artist, by an officer in uniform, with a waist like a wasp's, and pantaloons like two balloons. They all got into the next carriage together, accompanied by the two mysteries. They laughed. I am alone in the carriage (for I don't consider Demented anybody) and alone in the world.

Fields, windmills, low grounds, pollard-trees, windmills, fields, fortifications, Abbeville, soldiering and drumming. I wonder where England is, and when I was there last—about two years ago, I should say. Flying in and out among these trenches and batteries, skimming the clattering drawbridges, looking down into the stagnant ditches, I become a prisoner of state, escaping. I am confined with a comrade in a fortress. Our room is in an upper story. We have tried to get up the chimney, but there's an iron grating across it, imbedded in the masonry. After months of labor, we have worked the grating loose with the poker, and can lift it up. We have also made a hook, and twisted our rugs and blankets into ropes. Our plan is, to go up the chimney, hook our ropes to the top, descend hand over hand upon the roof of the guard-house far below, shake the hook loose, watch the opportunity of the sentinel's pacing away, hook again, drop into the ditch, swim across it, creep into the shelter of the wood. The time is come—a wild and stormy night. We are up the chimney, we are on the guard-house roof, we are swimming in the murky ditch, when lo! "Qui v'la" a bugle, the alarm, a crash! What is it? Death? No, Amiens.

More fortifications, more soldiering and drumming, more basins of soup, more little loaves of bread, more bottles of wine, more caraffes of brandy, more time for refreshment. Everything good, and everything ready.

Bright, unsubstantial-looking, scenic sort of station. People waiting. Houses, uniforms, beards, mustaches, some sabots, plenty of neat women, and a few old-visaged children. Unless it be a delusion born of my giddy flight, the grown-up people and the children seem to change places in France. In general, the boys and girls are little old men and women, and the men and women lively boys and girls.

Bugle, shriek, flight resumed. Monied Interest has come into my carriage. Says the manner of refreshing is "not bad," but considers it French. Admits great dexterity and politeness in the attendants. Thinks a decimal currency may have something to do with their dispatch in settling accounts, and don't know but what it's sensible and convenient. Adds, however, as a general protest, that they're a revolutionary people—and always at it.

Ramparts, canals, cathedral, river, soldiering and drumming, open country, river, earthenware manufactures, Creil. Again ten minutes. Not even Demented in a hurry. Station, a drawing-room with a veranda: like a planter's house. Monied Interest considers it a band-box, and not made to last. Little round tables in it, at one of which the sister artists and attendant mysteries are established with Wasp and Zamiel, as if they were going to stay a week.

Anon, with no more trouble than before, I am flying again, and lazily wondering as I fly. What has the South Eastern done with all the horrible little villages we used to pass through, in the diligence? What have they done with all the summer dust, with all the winter mud, with all the dreary avenues of little trees, with all ramshackle postyards, with all the beggers (who used to turn out at night with bits of lighted candle, to look in at the coach windows), with all the long-tailed horses who were always biting one another, with all the big postilions in jack-boots —with all the moldy cafés that we used to stop at, where a long mildewed tablecloth, set forth with jovial bottles of vinegar and oil, and with a Siamese arrangement of pepper and salt, was never wanting? Where are the grass-grown little towns, the wonderful little market-places all unconscious of markets, the shops that nobody kept, the streets that nobody trod, the churches that nobody went to, the bells that nobody rang, the tumble-down old buildings plastered with many-colored bills that nobody read? Where are the twenty-two weary hours of long, long day and night journey, sure to be either insupportably hot or insupportably cold? Where are the pains in my bones, where are the fidgets in my legs, where is the Frenchman with the nightcap who never would have the little coupé window down, and who always fell upon me when he went to sleep, and always slept all night snoring onions?

A voice breaks in with "Paris! Here we are!"

I have overflown myself, perhaps, but I can't believe it. I feel as if I were enchanted or betwitched. It is barely eight o'clock yet—it is nothing like half-past—when I have had my lugguge examined at that briskest of custom-houses attached to the station, and am rattling over the pavement in a hackney-cabriolet.

Surely, not the pavement of Paris? Yes, I think it is, too. I don't know any other place where there are all these high houses, all these haggard-looking wine shops, all these billiard tables, all those stocking-makers with flat red or yellow legs of wood for signboard, all these fuel shops with stacks of billets painted outside, and real billets sawing in the gutter, all these dirty corners of streets, all these cabinet pictures over dark doorways representing discreet matrons nursing babies. And yet this morning—I'll think of it in a warm bath.

Very like a small room that I remember in the Chinese baths upon the boulevard, certainly; and, though I see it through the steam, I think that I might swear to that peculiar hot-linen basket, like a large wicker hour-glass. When can it have been that I left home? When was it that I paid "through to Paris" at London Bridge, and discharged myself of all responsibility except the preservation of a voucher ruled into three divisions, of which the first was snipped off at Folkestone, the second aboard the boat, and the third taken at my journey's end? It seems to have been ages ago. Calculation is useless. I will go out for a walk.

The crowds in the streets, the lights in the shops and balconies, the elegance, variety, and beauty of their decorations, the number of the theaters, the brilliant cafés with their windows thrown up high and their vivacious groups at little tables on the pavement, the light and glitter of the houses turned as it were inside out, soon convince me that it is no dream; that I am in Paris, howsoever I got here. I stroll down to the sparkling Palais Royal, up the Rue de Rivoli, to the Place Vendome. As I glance into a print-shop window, Monied Interest, my late traveling companion, comes upon me, laughing with the highest relish of disdain. "Here's a people!" he says, pointing to Napoleon in the window and Napoleon on the column. "Only one idea all over Paris! A monomania!" Humph! I think I have seen Napoleon's match? There was a statue, when I came away, at Hyde Park Corner, and another in the city, and a print or two in the shops.

I walk up to the Barrière de l'Etoile, sufficiently dazed by my flight to have a pleasant doubt of the reality of everything about me; of the lively crowd, the overhanging trees, the performing dogs, the hobby-horses, the beautiful perspectives of shining lamps: the hundred and one inclosures, where the singing is, in gleaming orchestras of azure and gold, and where a star-eyed houri comes round with a box for voluntary offerings. So, I pass to my hotel, enchanted; sup, enchanted; go to bed, enchanted; pushing back this morning (if it really were this morning) into the remoteness of time, blessing the South Eastern Company for realizing the Arabian Nights in these prose days, murmuring, as I wing my idle flight into the land of dreams, "No hurry, ladies and gentlemen, going to Paris in eleven hours. It is so well done that there really is no hurry!"

THE DETECTIVE POLICE.

We are not by any means devout believers in the old Bow Street Police. To say the truth, we think there was a vast amount of humbug about those worthies. Apart from many of them being men of very indifferent character, and far too much in the habit of consorting with thieves and the like, they never lost a public occasion of jobbing and trading in mystery and making the most of themselves. Continually puffed besides by incompetent magistrates anxious to conceal their own deficiencies, and hand-in-glove with the penny-a-liners of that time, they became a sort of superstition. Although as a preventive police they were utterly ineffective, and as a detective police were very loose and uncertain in their operations, they remain with some people a superstition to the present day.

On the other hand, the detective force organized since the establishment of the existing police, is so well chosen and trained, proceeds so systematically and quietly, does its business in such a workmanlike manner, and is always so calmly and steadily engaged in the service of the public, that the public really do not know enough of it to know a tithe of its usefulness. Impressed with this conviction, and interested in the men themselves, we represented to the authorities at Scotland Yard that we should be glad, if there were no official objection, to have some talk with the detectives. A most obliging and ready permission being given, a certain evening was appointed with a certain inspector for a social conference between ourselves and the detectives, at the *Household Words* office in Wellington Street, Strand, London. In consequence of which appointment the party "came off," which we are about to describe. And we beg to repeat that, avoiding such topics as it might for obvious reasons be injurious to the public, or disagreeable to respectable individuals, to touch upon in print, our description is as exact as we can make it.

The reader will have the goodness to imagine the *sanctum sanctorum* of *Household Words*. Anything that best suits the reader's fancy, will best represent that magnificent chamber. We merely stipulate for a round table in the middle, with some glasses and cigars arranged upon it; and the editorial sofa elegantly hemmed in between that stately piece of furniture and the wall.

It is a sultry evening at dusk. The stones of Wellington Street are hot and gritty, and the waterman and hackney-coachman at the theater opposite are much flushed and aggravated. Carriages are constantly setting down the people who have come to fairy-land; and there is a mighty shouting and bellowing every now and then, deafening us for the moment, through the open windows.

Just at dusk, Inspectors Wield and Stalker are announced; but we do not undertake to warrant the orthography of any of the names here mentioned. Inspector

Wield presents Inspector Stalker. Inspector Wield is a middle-aged man of a portly presence, with a large, moist, knowing eye, a husky voice, and a habit of emphasizing his conversation by the aid of a corpulent forefinger, which is constantly in juxtaposition with his eyes or nose. Inspector Stalker is a shrewd, hard-headed Scotchman—in appearance not at all unlike a very acute, thoroughly-trained schoolmaster, from the Normal Establishment at Glasgow. Inspector Wield one might have known, perhaps, for what he is—Inspector Stalker, never.

The ceremonies of reception over, Inspectors Wield and Stalker observe that they have brought some sergeants with them. The sergeants are presented—five in number, Sergeant Dornton, Sergeant Witchem, Sergeant Mith, Sergeant Fendall, and Sergeant Straw. We have the whole detective force from Scotland Yard, with one exception. They sit down in a semicircle (the two inspectors at the two ends) at a little distance from the round table, facing the editorial sofa. Every man of them, in a glance, immediately takes an inventory of the furniture and an accurate sketch of the editorial presence. The editor feels that any gentleman in company could take him up, if need should be, without the smallest hesitation, twenty years hence.

The whole party are in plain clothes. Sergeant Dornton, about fifty years of age, with a ruddy face and a high sunburnt forehead, has the air of one who has been a sergeant in the army—he might have sat to Wilkie for the soldier in the "Reading of the Will." He is famous for steadily pursuing the inductive process, and from small beginnings, working on from clue to clue until he bags his man. Sergeant Witchem, shorter and thicker-set, and marked with the small-pox, has something of a reserved and thoughtful air, as if he were engaged in deep arithmetical calculations. He is renowned for his acquaintance with the swell mob. Sergeant Mith, a smooth-faced man with a fresh, bright complexion, and a strange air of simplicity, is a dab at housebreakers. Sergeant Fendall, a light-haired, well-spoken, polite person, is a prodigious hand at pursuing private inquiries of a delicate nature. Straw, a little wiry sergeant of meek demeanor and strong sense, would knock at a door and ask a series of questions in any mild character you choose to prescribe to him, from a charity-boy upward, and seem as innocent as an infant. They are, one and all, respectable-looking men; of perfectly good deportment and unusual intelligence; with nothing lounging or slinking in their manners; with an air of keen observation and quick perception when addressed; and generally presenting in their faces traces more or less marked of habitually leading lives of strong mental excitement. They have all good eyes; and they all can, and they all do, look full at whomsover they speak to.

We light the cigars, and hand round the glasses (which are very temperately used indeed), and the conversation begins by a modest amateur reference on the editorial part to the swell mob. Inspector Wield immediately removes his cigar from his lips, waves his right hand, and says, "Regarding the swell mob, sir, I can't do better than call upon Sergeant Witchem. Because the reason why? I'll tell you. Sergeant Witchem is better acquainted with the swell mob than any officer in London."

Our heart leaping up when we beheld this rainbow in the sky, we turn to Sergeant Witchem, who very concisely, and in well-chosen language, goes into the subject forthwith. Meantime, the whole of his brother officers are closely interested in attending to what he says, and observing its effect. Presently they begin to strike in, one or two together, when an opportunity offers, and the conversation becomes general. But these brother officers only come in to the assistance of each other—not to the contradiction—and a more amicable brotherhood there could not be. From the swell mob, we diverge to the kindred topics of cracksmen, fences, public-house dancers, area-sneaks, designing young people who go out "gonophing," and other "schools." It is observable throughout these revelations that Inspector Stalker, the Scotchman, is always exact and statistical, and that when any question of figures arises, everybody as by one consent pauses and looks to him.

When we have exhausted the various schools of art—during which discussion the whole body have remained profoundly attentive, except when some unusual noise at the theater over the way has induced some gentleman to glance inquiringly toward the window in that direction, behind his next neighbor's back—we burrow for information on such points as the following. Whether there really are any highway robberies in London, or whether some circumstances not convenient to be mentioned by the aggrieved party usually precede the robberies complained of under that head, which quite change their character? Certainly the latter, almost always. Whether in the case of robberies in houses, where servants are necessarily exposed to doubt, innocence under suspicion ever becomes so like guilt in appearance that a good officer need be cautious how he judges it? Undoubtedly. Nothing is so common or deceptive as such appearances at first. Whether in a place of public amusement, a thief knows an officer, and an officer knows a thief—supposing them, beforehand, strangers to each other—because each recognizes in the other, under all disguise, an inattention to what is going on, and a purpose that is not the purpose of being entertained? Yes. That's the way exactly. Whether it is reasonable or ridiculous to trust to the alleged experiences of thieves as narrated by themselves, in prisons, or penitentiaries, or anywhere? In general, nothing more absurd. Lying is their habit and their trade; and they would rather lie—even if they hadn't an interest in it, and didn't want to make themselves agreeable—than tell the truth.

From these topics, we glide into a review of the most celebrated and horrible of the great crimes that have been committed within the last fifteen or twenty years. The men engaged in the discovery of almost all of them, and in the pursuit or apprehension of the murderers, are here, down to the very last instance. One of our guests gave chase to and boarded the emigrant ship in which the murderess last hanged in London was supposed to have embarked. We learn from him that his errand was not announced to the passengers, who may have no idea of it to this hour. That he went below with the captain, lamp in hand—it being dark and the whole steerage abed and sea sick—and engaged the Mrs. Manning who was on board in a conversation about her luggage, until she was, with no small pains, induced to raise her head and turn her face toward the light. Satisfied that she was not the object of his search, he quietly reëmbarked in the government steamer alongside, and steamed home again with the intelligence.

When we have exhausted these subjects, too, which occupy a considerable time in the discussion, two or three leave their chairs, whisper Sergeant Witchem, and resume their seats. Sergeant Witchem, leaning forward a little, and placing a hand on each of his legs, then modestly speaks as follows:

"My brother-officers wish me to relate a little account of my taking Tally-ho Thompson. A man oughtn't to tell what he has done himself; but still, as nobody was with me, and, consequently, as nobody but myself can tell it, I'll do it in the best way I can, if it should meet your approval."

We assure Sergeant Witchem that he will oblige us very much, and we all compose ourselves to listen with great interest and attention.

"Tally-ho Thompson," says Sergeant Witchem, after mereby wetting his lips with his brandy and water, "Tally-ho Thompson was a famous horse-stealer, couper, and magsman. Thompson, in conjunction with a pal that occasionally worked with him, gammoned a countryman out of a good round sum of money, under pretense of getting him a situation—the regular old dodge—and was afterward in the 'Hue and Cry' for a horse—a horse that he stole, down in Hertfordshire. I had to look after Thompson, and I applied myself, of course, in the first instance, to discovering where he was. Now, Thompson's wife lived, along with a little daughter, at Chelsea. Knowing that Thompson was somewhere in the country, I watched the house—especially at post-time in the morning—thinking Thompson was pretty likely to write to her. Sure enough, one morning the postman comes up and delivers a letter at Mrs. Thompson's door. Little girl opens the door and takes it in. We're not always sure of postmen, though the people at the post-offices are always very obliging. A postman may help us, or he may not—just as it happens. However, I go across the road, and I say to the postman, after he has left the letter, 'Good-morning! how are you?' 'How are you?' says he. 'You've just delivered a letter for Mrs. Thompson.' 'Yes, I have.' 'You didn't happen to remark what the post-mark was, perhaps?' 'No,' says he, 'I didn't.' 'Come,' says I, 'I'll be plain with you. I'm in a small way of business, and I have given Thompson credit, and I can't afford to lose what he owes me. I know he's got money, and I know he's in the country, and if you could tell me what the post-mark was, I should be very much obliged to you, and you'd do a service to a tradesman in a small way of business that can't afford a loss.' 'Well,' he said, 'I do assure you that I did not observe what the post-mark was: all I know is, that there was money in the letter—I should say a sovereign.' This was enough for me, because of course I knew that Thompson having sent his wife money, it was probable she'd write to Thompson, by return of post, to acknowledge the receipt. So I said, 'Thankee' to the postman, and I kept on the watch. In the afternoon I saw the little girl come out. Of course I followed her. She went into a stationer's shop, and I needn't say to you that I looked in at the window. She bought some writing-paper and envelopes, and a pen. I think to myself, 'That'll do!'—watch her home again—and don't go away, you may be sure, knowing that Mrs. Thompson was writing her letter to Tally-ho, and that the letter would be posted presently. In about an hour or so, out came the little girl again, with the letter in her hand. I went up, and said something to the child, whatever it might have been; but I couldn't see the direction of the letter, because she held it with the seal upward. However, I observed that on the back of the letter there was what we call a kiss—a drop of wax by the side of the seal—and again, you understand, that was enough for me. I saw her post the letter, waited till she was gone, then went into the shop, and asked to see the master. When he came out, I told him, 'Now, I'm an officer in the detective force; there's a letter with a kiss been posted here just now, for a man that I'm in search of; and what I have to ask of you, is, that you will let me look at the direction of that letter.' He was very civil—took a lot of letters from the box in the window—shook 'em out on the counter with the faces downward—and there among 'em was the identical letter with the kiss. It was directed Mr. Thomas Pigeon, Post Office, B——, to be left till called for. Down I went to B—— (a hundred and twenty miles or so) that night. Early next morning I went to the post-office; saw the gentleman in charge of that department; told him who I was; and that my object was to see and track the party that should come for the letter for Mr. Thomas Pigeon.

He was very polite, and said, 'You shall have every assistance we can give you; you can wait inside the office; and we'll take care to let you know when anybody comes for the letter.' Well, I waited there three days and began to think that nobody ever would come. At last the clerk whispered to me, 'Here! Detective! Somebody's come for the letter!' 'Keep him a minute,' said I, and I ran round to the outside of the office. There I saw a young chap with the appearance of an ostler, holding a horse by the bridle—stretching the bridle across the pavement, while he waited at the post-office window for the letter. I began to pat the horse, and that; and I said to the boy, 'Why, this is Mr. Jones' mare!' 'No. It ain't.' 'No?' said I. 'She's very like Mr. Jones' mare!' 'She ain't Mr. Jones' mare, anyhow,' says he. 'It's Mr. So and So's of the Warwick Arms.' And up he jumped, and off he went—letter and all. I got a cab, followed on the box, and was so quick after him that I came into the stableyard of the Warwick Arms, by one gate, just as he came in by another. I went into the bar, where there was a young woman serving, and called for a glass of brandy-and-water. He came in directly and handed her the letter. She casually looked at it, without saying anything, and stuck it up behind the glass over the chimney-piece. What was to be done next?

"I turned it over in my mind while I drank my brandy-and-water (looking pretty sharp at the letter the while) but I couldn't see my way out of it at all. I tried to get lodgings in the house, but there had been a horse-fair, or something of that sort, and it was full. I was obliged to put up somewhere else, but I came backward and forward to the bar for a couple of days, and there was the letter always behind the glass. At last I thought I'd write a letter to Mr. Pigeon myself, and see what that would do. So I wrote one, and posted it, but I purposely addressed it Mr. John Pigeon instead of Mr. Thomas Pigeon, to see what that would do. In the morning (a very wet morning it was) I watched the postman down the street, and cut into the bar just before he reached the Warwick Arms. In he came presently with my letter. 'Is there a Mr. John Pigeon staying here?' 'No!--stop a bit though,' says the barmaid; and she took down the letter behind the glass. 'No,' says she, 'it's Thomas, and he is not staying here.

Would you do me a favor, and post this for me, as it is so wet?' The postman said yes; she folded it in another envelope, directed it, and gave it to him. He put it in his hat, and away he went.

"I had no difficulty in finding out the direction of that letter. It was addressed Mr. Thomas Pigeon, Post Office, R——, Northamptonshire, to be left till called for. Off I started directly for R——; I said the same at the post-office there, as I had said at B——; and again I waited three days before anybody came. At last another chap on horseback came. 'Any letters for Mr. Thomas Pigeon?' 'Where do you come from?' 'New Inn, near R——.' He got the letter and away he went at a canter.

"I made my inquiries about the New Inn, near R——, and hearing it was a solitary sort of a house, a little in the horse line, about a couple of miles from the station, I thought I'd go and have a look at it. I found it what it had been described, and sauntered in, to look about me. The landlady was in the bar, and I was trying to get into conversation with her; asked her how business was, and spoke about the wet weather, and so on; when I saw, through an open door, three men sitting by the fire in a sort of parlor, or kitchen; and one of those men according to the description I had of him, was Tally-ho Thompson!

I went and sat down among 'em and tried to make things agreeable; but they were very shy—wouldn't talk at all—looked at me, and at one another, in a way quite the reverse of sociable. I reckoned 'em up, and finding that they were all three bigger men than me, and considering that their looks were ugly—that it was a lonely place—railroad station two miles off—and night coming on—thought I couldn't do better than have a drop of brandy-and-water to keep my courage up. So I called for my brandy-and-water; and as I was sitting drinking it by the fire Thompson got up and went out.

"Now the difficulty of it was, that I wasn't sure it was Thompson, because I had never set eyes on him before; and what I had wanted was to be quite certain of him. However, there was nothing for it now, but to follow, and put a bold face upon it. I found him talking, outside in the yard, with the landlady. It turned out afterward that he was wanted by a Northampton officer for something else, and that, knowing that officer to be pockmarked (as I am myself), he mistook me for him. As I have observed, I found him talking to the landlady outside. I put my hand upon his shoulder—this way—and said, 'Tally-ho Thompson, it's no use. I know you. I'm an officer from London, and I take you into custody for felony!' 'That be d—d!' says Tally-ho Thompson.

"We went back into the house, and the two friends began to cut up rough, and their looks didn't please me at all, I assure you. 'Let the man go. What are you going to do with him?' 'I'll tell you what I'm going to do with him. I'm going to take him to London to-night, as sure as I'm alive. I'm not alone here, whatever you may think. You mind your own business, and keep yourselves to yourselves. It'll be better for you, for I know you both very well.' I'd never seen or heard of 'em in all my life, but my bouncing cowed 'em a bit, and they kept off, while Thompson was making ready to go. I thought to myself, however, that they might be coming after me on the dark road, to rescue Thompson; so I said to the landlady, 'What men have you got in the house, missis?' 'We haven't got no men here,' she says sulkily. 'You have got an ostler, I suppose?' 'Yes, we've got an ostler.' 'Let me see him.' Presently he came, and a shaggy-headed young fellow he was. 'Now attend to me, young man,' says I; 'I'm a detective officer from London. This man's name is Thompson. I have taken him into custody for felony. I am going to take him to the railroad station. I call upon you in the queen's name to assist me; and mind you, my friend, you'll get yourself into more trouble than you know of, if you don't!' You never saw a person open his eyes so wide. 'Now, Thompson, come along!' says I. But when I took out the handcuffs, Thomspon cries, 'No! None of that! I won't stand them! I'll go along with you quiet, but I won't bear none of that!' 'Tally-ho Thompson,' I said, 'I'm willing to behave as a man to you, if you are willing to behave as a man to me. Give me your word that you'll come peaceably along, and I don't want to handcuff you.' 'I will,' says Thompson, 'but I'll have a glass of brandy first.' 'I don't care if I've another,' said I. 'We'll have two more, missis, said the friends, 'and confound you, constable, you'll give your man a drop, won't you?' I was agreeable to that, so we had it all round, and then my man and I took Tally-ho Thompson safe to the railroad, and I carried him to London that night. He was afterward acquitted, on account of a defect in the evidence; and I understand he always praises me up to the skies, and says I'm one of the best of men."

This story coming to a termination amid general applause, Inspector Wield, after a little grave smoking, fixes his eye on his host. and thus delivers himself:

"It wasn't a bad plant that of mine, on Fikey, the man accused of forging the Sou' Western Railway debentures —it was only t'other day—because the reason why? I'll tell you.

"I had information that Fikey and his brother kept a factory over yonder there"—indicating any region on the Surrey side of the river—"where he bought second-hand carriages; so after I'd tried in vain to get hold of him by other means, I wrote him a letter in an assumed name, saying that I'd got a horse and shay to dispose of, and would drive down next day that he might view the lot, and make an offer—very reasonable it was, I said—a reg'lar bargain. Straw and me then went off to a friend of mine that's in the livery and job business, and hired a turn-out for the day, a precious smart turn-out it was—quite a slap-up thing! Down we drove, accordingly, with a friend (who's not in the force himself); and leaving my friend in the shay near a public-house, to take care of the horse, we went to the factory, which was some little way off. In the factory, there was a number of strong fellows at work, and after reckoning'em up it was clear to me that it wouldn't do to try it on there. They were too many for us. We must get our man out of doors. 'Mr. Fikey at home?' 'No, he ain't.' 'Expected home soon?' 'Why, no, not soon.' 'Ah! Is his brother here?' 'I'm his brother.' 'Oh! well, this is an ill-convenience, this is. I wrote him a letter yesterday, saying I'd got a little turn-out to dispose of, and I've took the trouble to bring the turn-out down a' purpose, and now he ain't in the way.' 'No, he ain't in the way. You couldn't make it convenient to call again, could you?' 'Why, no, I couldn't. I want to sell; that's the fact; and I can't put it off. Could you find him anywhere?' At first he said No, he couldn't, and then he wasn't sure about it, and then he'd go and try. So at last he went up stairs, where there was a sort of loft, and presently down comes my man himself in his shirt-sleeves.

"'Well,' he says, 'this seems to be rayther a pressing matter of yours.' 'Yes,' I says, 'it is rayther a pressing matter, and you'll find it a bargain—dirt cheap.' 'I ain't in partickler want of a bargain just now,' he says, 'but where is it?' 'Why,' I says, 'the turn-out's just outside. Come and look at it.' He hasn't any suspicions, and away we go. And the first thing that happens is, that the horse runs away with my friend (who knows no more of driving than a child) when he takes a little trot along the road to show his paces. You never saw such a game in your life!

"When the bolt is over, and the turn-out has come to a stand-still again, Fikey walks round and round it as grave as a judge—me too. 'There, sir!' I says. 'There's a neat thing!' It ain't a bad style of thing,' he says. 'I believe you,' says I. 'And there's a horse!'—for I saw him looking at it. 'Rising eight!' I says, rubbing his forelegs. (Bless you, there ain't a man in the world knows less of horses than I do, but I heard my friend at the livery stables say he was eight year old, so I says, as knowing as possible, 'Rising eight.') 'Rising eight, is he?' says he. 'Rising eight,' says I. 'Well,' he says, 'what do you want for it?' 'Why, the first and last figure for the whole concern is twenty-five pound!' 'That's very cheap!' he says, looking at me. 'Ain't it?' I says. 'I told you it was a bargain! Now, without any higgling and haggling about it, what I want is to sell, and that's my price. Further, I'll make it easy to you, and take half the money down, and you can do a bit of stiff* for the balance.' 'Well,' he says again, 'that's very cheap.' 'I believe you,' says I; 'get in and try it, and you'll buy it. Come! take a trial!'

"Ecod, he gets in, and we get in, and we drive along the road, to show him to one of the railway clerks that was hid in the public-house window to identify him. But the clerk was bothered, and didn't know whether it was him, or wasn't—because the reason why? I'll tell you—on account of his having shaved his whiskers. 'It's a clever little horse,' he says, 'and trots well; and the shay runs light.' 'Not a doubt about it,' I says. 'And now, Mr. Fikey, I may as well make it all right, without wasting any more of your time. This fact is, I'm Inspector Wield, and you're my prisoner.' 'You don't mean that?' he says. 'I do indeed.' 'Then burn my body,' says Fikey, 'if this ain't too bad!'

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* Give a bill.

"Perhaps you never saw a man so knocked over with surprise. 'I hope you'll let me have my coat?' he says. 'By all means.' 'Well, then, let's drive to the factory. 'Why, not exactly that, I think,' said I; 'I've been there, once before, to-day. Suppose we send for it.' He saw it was no go, so he sent for it, and put it on, and we drove him up to London, comfortable."

This reminiscence is in the height of its success, when a general proposal is made to the fresh-complexioned, smooth-faced officer, with a strange air of simplicity, to tell the "Butcher's Story."

The fresh-complexioned, smooth-faced officer, with the strange air of simplicity, began with a rustic smile, and in a soft, wheedling tone of voice, to relate the Butcher's Story, thus:

"It's just about six years ago, now, since information was given at Scotland Yard of there being extensive robberies of lawns and silks going on, at some wholesale houses in the city. Directions were given for the business being looked into; and Straw, and Fendall, and me, we were all in it."

"When you received your instructions," said we, "you went away, and held a sort of Cabinet Council together!"

The smooth-faced officer coaxingly replied, "Ye-es. Just so. We turned it over among ourselves a good deal. It appeared, when we went into it, that the goods were sold by the receivers extraordinarily cheap—much cheaper than they could have been if they had been honestly come by. The receivers were in the trade, and kept capital shops—establishments of the first respectability—one of 'em at the West End, one down at Westminster. After a lot of watching and inquiry, and this and that among ourselves, we found that the job was managed and the purchases of the stolen goods made at a little public-house near Smithfield, down by Saint Bartholomew's; where the warehouse porters, who were the thieves, took 'em for that purpose, don't you see? and made appointments to meet the people that went between themselves and the receivers. This public-house was principally used by journeymen butchers from the country, out of place, and in want of situations; so, what did we do, but—ha, ha, ha! —we agreed that I should be dressed up like a butcher myself, and go and live there!"

Never, surely, was a faculty of observation better brought to bear upon a purpose than that which picked out this officer for the part. Nothing in all creation could have suited him better. Even while he spoke, he became a greasy, sleepy, shy, good-natured, chuckle-headed, unsuspicious, and confiding young butcher. His very hair seemed to have suet in it, as he made it smooth upon his head, and his fresh complexion to be lubricated by large quantities of animal food.

"So I—ha, ha, ha!" (always with the confiding snigger of the foolish young butcher) "so I dressed myself in the regular way, made up a little bundle of clothes, and went to the public-house, and asked if I could have a lodging there? They says, 'Yes, you can have a lodging here,' and I got a bedroom, and settled myself down in the tap. There was a number of people about the place, and coming backward and forward to the house; and first one says, and then another says, 'Are you from the country, young man?' 'Yes,' I says, 'I am. I'm come out of Northamptonshire, and I'm quite lonely here, for I don't know London at all, and it's such a mighty big town.' 'It is a big town,' they says. 'Oh, it's a very big town!' I says. 'Really and truly I never was in such a town. It quite confuses me!'—and all that, you know.

"When some of the journeymen butchers that used the house, found that I wanted a place, they says, 'Oh, we'll get you a place!' And they actually took me to a sight of places in Newgate Market, Newport Market, Clare, Carnaby—I don't know where all. But the wages was—ha, ha, ha!—was not sufficient, and I never could suit myself, don't you see? Some of the queer frequenters of the house were a little suspicious of me at first, and I was obliged to be very cautious indeed how I communicated with Straw or Fendall. Sometimes, when I went out, pretending to stop and look into the shop windows, and just casting my eyes round, I used to see some of 'em following me; but, being perhaps better accustomed than they thought for to that sort of thing, I used to lead 'em on as far as I thought necessary or convenient—sometimes a long way—and then turn sharp round, and meet 'em, and say, 'Oh, dear, how glad I am to come upon you so fortunate! This London's such a place, I'm blowed if I ain't lost again!' And then we'd go back all together, to the public-house, and—ha, ha, ha!—and smoke our pipes, don't you see?

"They were very attentive to me, I am sure. It was a common thing while I was living there for some of 'em to take me out and show me London. They showed me the prisons—showed me Newgate—and when they showed me Newgate, I stops at the place where the porters pitch their loads, and says, 'Oh, dear, is this where they hang the men? Oh Lor!' 'That!' they says, 'what a simple cove he is! That ain't it!' And then they pointed out which was it, and I says 'Lor!' and they says, 'Now you'll know it agen, won't you?' And I said I thought I should if I tried hard—and I assure you I kept a sharp lookout for the city police when we were out in this way, for if any of 'em had happened to know me and had spoke to me, it would have been all up in a minute. However, by good luck such a thing never happened, and all went on quiet, though the difficulties I had in communicating with my brother officers were quite extraordinary.

"The stolen goods that were brought to the public-house by the warehouse porters were always disposed of in a back parlor. For a long time I never could get into this parlor or see what was done there. As I sat smoking my pipe, like an innocent young chap, by the tap-room fire, I'd hear some of the parties to the robbery, as they came in and out, say softly to the landlord, 'Who's that? What does he do here?' 'Bless your soul,' says the landlord, he's only a'—ha, ha, ha!—'he's only a green young fellow from the country, as is looking for a butcher's sitiwation. Don't mind him!' So, in course of time, they were so convinced of my being green, and got to be so accustomed to me, that I was as free of the parlor as any of 'em, and I have seen as much as £70 worth of fine lawn sold there, in one night, that was stolen from a warehouse in Friday Street. After the sale the buyers always stood treat—hot supper, or dinner, or what not—and they'd say on those occasions, 'Come on, butcher! Put your best leg foremost, young 'un, and walk into it!' Which I used to do—and hear, at table, all manner of particulars that it was very important for us detectives to know.

"This went on for ten weeks. I lived in the public-house all the time, and never was out of the butcher's dress—except in bed. At last, when I had followed seven of the thieves and set 'em to rights—that's an expression of ours, don't you see, by which I mean to say that I traced 'em, and found out where the robberies were done, and all about 'em—Straw, and Fendall, and I gave one another the office, and at a time agreed upon, a descent was made upon the public-house, and the apprehensions effected. One of the first things the officers did was to collar me—for the parties to the robbery weren't to suppose yet that I was anything but a butcher—on which the landlord cries out, 'Don't take him,' he says, 'whatever you do! He's only a poor young chap from the country, and butter wouldn't melt in his mouth!' However, they—ha, ha, ha!—they took me, and pretended to search my bedroom, where nothing was found but an old fiddle belonging to the landlord, that had got there somehow or another. But, it entirely changed the landlord's opinion, for when it was produced, he says, 'My fiddle! The butcher's a pur-loiner! I give him into custody for the robbery of a musical instrument!'

"The man that had stolen the goods in Friday Street was not taken yet. He had told me, in confidence, that he had his suspicions there was something wrong (on account of the city police having captured one of the party), and that he was going to make himself scarce. I asked him, Where do you mean to go, Mr. Shepherdson?' 'Why, butcher,' says he, 'the Setting Moon in the Commercial Road, is a snug house, and I shall hang out there for a time. I shall call myself Simpson, which appears to me to be a modest sort of a name. Perhaps you'll give us a look in, butcher?' 'Well,' says I, 'I think I will give you a call'—which I fully intended, don't you see, because, of course, he was to be taken! I went over to the Setting Moon next day, with a brother officer, and asked at the bar for Simpson. They pointed out his room, up stairs. As we were going up, he looks down over the banisters, and calls out, 'Halloa, butcher! is that you?' 'Yes it's me. How do find yourself?' 'Bobbish,' he says; 'but who's that with you?' 'It's only a young man, that's a friend of mine,' I says. 'Come along, then,' says he; 'any friend of the butcher's is as welcome as the butcher!'

So, I made my friend acquainted with him, and we took him into custody.

"You have no idea, sir, what a sight it was, in court, when they first knew that I wasn't a butcher, after all! I wasn't produced at the first examination, when there was a remand; but I was at the second. And when I stepped into the box, in full police uniform, and the whole party saw how they had been done, actually a groan of horror and dismay proceeded from 'em in the dock!

"At the Old Bailey, when their trials came on, Mr. Clarkson was engaged for the defence, and he couldn't make out how it was, about the butcher. He thought, all along, it was a real butcher. When the counsel for the prosecution said, 'I will now call before you, gentlemen, the police-officer,' meaning myself, Mr. Clarkson says, 'Why police-officer? Why more police-officers? I don't want police. We have had a great deal too much of the police. I want the butcher!' However, sir, he had the butcher and the police-officer, both in one. Out of seven prisoners committed for trial, five were found guilty, and some of 'em were transported. The respectable firm at the West End got a term of imprisonment; and that's the butcher's story!"

The story done, the chuckle-headed butcher again resolved himself into the smooth-faced detective. But he was so extremely tickled by their having taken him about, when he was that dragon in disguise, to show him London, that he could not help reverting to that point in his narrative; and gently repeating, with the butcher snigger, "'Oh, dear,' I says, 'is that where they hang the men? Oh, Lor!' 'That!' says they. 'What a simple cove he is!'"

It being now late, and the party very modest in their fear of being too diffuse, there were some tokens of separation; when Sergeant Dornton, the soldierly-looking man, said, looking round him with a smile:

"Before we break up, sir, perhaps you might have some amusement in hearing the adventures of a carpet-bag. They are very short; and, I think, curious."

We welcomed the carpet-bag, as cordially as Mr. Shepherdson welcomed the false butcher at the Setting Moon. Sergeant Dornton proceeded.

"In 1847, I was despatched to Chatham, in search of one Mesheck, a Jew. He had been carrying on, pretty heavily, in the bill-stealing way, getting acceptances from young men of good connections (in the army chiefly), on pretence of discount, and bolting with the same.

"Mesheck was off before I got to Chatham. All I could learn about him was, that he had gone, probably to London, and had with him—a carpet-bag.

"I came back to town, by the last train from Blackwall, and made inquiries concerning a Jew passenger with—a carpet-bag.

"The office was shut up, it being the last train. There were only two or three porters left. Looking after a Jew with a carpet-bag, on the Blackwall Railway, which was then the high road to a great military depot, was worse than looking after a needle in a hayrick. But it happened that one of these porters had carried, for a certain Jew, to a certain public house, a certain—carpet-bag.

"I went to the public-house, but the Jew had only left his luggage there for a few hours, and had called for it in a cab and taken it away. I put such questions there, and to the porter, as I thought prudent, and got at this description of—the carpet-bag.

"It was a bag which had, on one side of it, worked in worsted, a green parrot on a stand. A green parrot on a stand was the means by which to identify that—carpet-bag.

"I traced Mesheck, by means of this green parrot on a stand, to Cheltenham, to Birmingham, to Liverpool, to the Atlantic Ocean. At Liverpool he was too many for me. He had gone to the United States, and I gave up all thoughts of Mesheck, and likewise of his—carpet-bag.

"Many months afterward—near a year afterward—there was a bank in Ireland robbed of several thousand pounds, by a person of the name of Dr. Dundey, who escaped to America; from which country some of the stolen notes came home. He was supposed to have bought a farm in New Jersey. Under proper management, that estate could be seized and sold, for the benefit of the parties he had defrauded. I was sent off to America for this purpose.

"I landed at Boston. I went on to New York. I found that he had lately changed New York paper-money for New Jersey paper-money, and had banked cash in New Brunswick. To take this Dr. Dundey, it was necessary to entrap him into the State of New York, which required a deal of artifice and trouble. At one time, he couldn't be drawn into an appointment. At another time, he appointed to come to meet me, and a New York officer, on a pretext I made; and then his children had the measles. At last he came, per steam-boat, and I took him, and lodged him in a New York prison called the Tombs; which I dare say you know, sir?"

Editorial acknowledgment to that effect.

"I went to the Tombs, on the morning after his capture, to attend the examination before the magistrate. I was passing through the magistrate's private room, when, happening to look round me to take notice of the place, as we generally have a habit of doing, I clapped my eyes, in one corner, on a—carpet-bag.

"What did I see upon that carpet-bag, if you'll believe me, but a green parrot on a stand, as large as life.

"'That carpet-bag, with the representation of a green parrot on a stand,' said I, 'belongs to an English Jew, named Aaron Mesheck, and to no other man, alive or dead!'

"I give you my worth the New York police officers were doubled up with surprise.

"'How did you ever come to know that?' said they.

"'I think I ought to know that green parrot by this time,' said I; 'for I have had as pretty a dance after that bird, at home, as ever I had, in all my life!'"

"And was it Mesheck's?" we submissively inquired.

"Was it, sir? Of course it was! He was in custody for another offence, in that very identical Tombs, at that very identical time. And, more than that! Some memoranda, relating to the fraud for which I had vainly endeavored to take him, were found to be, at that moment, lying in that very same individual—carpet-bag!"

Such are the curious coincidences and such is the peculiar ability, always sharpening and being improved by practice, and always adapting itself to every variety of circumstances, and opposing itself to every new device that perverted ingenuity can invent, for which this important social branch of the public service is remarkable! For ever on the watch, with their wits stretched to the utmost, these officers have, from day to day and year to year, to set themselves against every novelty of trickery and dexterity that the combined imaginations of all the lawless rascals in England can devise, and to keep pace with every such invention that comes out. In the courts of justice the materials of thousands of such stories as we have narrated —often elevated into the marvelous and romantic by the circumstance of the case—are dryly compressed into the set phrase, "in consequence of information I received, I did so and so." Suspicion was to be directed, by careful inference and deduction, upon the right person; the right person was to be taken, wherever he had gone, or whatever he was doing to avoid detection: he is taken; there he is at the bar; that is enough. From information I, the officer, received, I did it; and according to the custom in these case I say no more.

These games of chess, played with live pieces, are played before small audiences, and are chronicled nowhere. The interest of the game supports the players. Its results are enough for justice. To compare great things with small, suppose Leverrier or Adams informing the public that from information he had received he had discovered a new planet; or Columbus informing the public of his day that from information he had received he had discovered a new continent; so the detectives inform it that they have discovered a new fraud or an old offender, and the process is unknown.

Thus, at midnight, closed the proceedings of our curious and interesting party. But one other circumstance finally wound up the evening after our detective guests had left us. One of the sharpest among them, and the officer best acquainted with the swell mob, had his pocket picked going home!

THREE "DETECTIVE" ANECDOTES.

I.—The Pair of Gloves.

"It's a singler story, sir," said Inspector Wield, of the detective police, who, in company with Sergeants Dornton and Mith, paid us another twilight visit one July evening; "and I've been thinking you might like to know it.

"It's concerning the murder of the young woman Eliza Grimwood, some years ago, over in the Waterloo Road. She was commonly called the Countess, because of her handsome appearance and her proud way of carrying of herself; and when I saw the poor Countess (I had known her well to speak to) lying dead, with her throat cut, on the floor of her bedroom, you'll believe me that a variety of reflections calculated to make a man rather low in his spirits came into my head.

"That's neither here nor there. I went to the house the morning after the murder, and examined the body, and made a general observation of the bedroom where it was. Turning down the pillow of the bed with my hand, I found, underneath it, a pair of gloves. A pair of gentleman's dress gloves, very dirty; and inside the lining the letters Tʀ and a cross.

"Well, sir, I took them gloves away, and I showed 'em to the magistrate over at Union Hall, before whom the case was. He says, 'Wield,' he says, 'there's no doubt this is a discovery that may lead to something very important; and what you have got to do, Wield, is to find out the owner of these gloves.'

"I was of the same opinion, of course, and I went at it immediately. I looked at the gloves pretty narrowly, and it was my opinion that they had been cleaned. There was a smell of sulphur and rosin about 'em, you know, which cleaned gloves usually have more or less. I took 'em over to a friend of mine at Kennington, who was in that line, and I put it to him. 'What do you say now? Have these gloves been cleaned?' 'These gloves have been cleaned,' says he. 'Have you any idea who cleaned them?' says I. 'Not at all,' says he; 'I've a very distinct idea who didn't clean 'em, and that's myself. But I'll tell you what, Wield, there ain't above eight or nine reg'lar glove-cleaners in London'—there were not, at that time, it seems—'and I think I can give you their addresses, and you may find out by that means who did clean 'em.' Accordingly he gave me the directions, and I went here, and I went there, and I looked up this man, and I looked up that man; but though they all agreed that the gloves had been cleaned, I couldn't find the man, woman, or child that had cleaned that aforesaid pair of gloves.

"What with this person not being at home, and that person being expected home in the afternoon, and so forth, the inquiry took me three days. On the evening of the third day, coming over Waterloo Bridge from the Surrey side of the river, quite beat and very much vexed and disappointed, I thought I'd have a shilling's worth of entertainment at the Lyceum Theater to freshen myself up. So I went into the pit, at half-price, and I sat myself down next to a very quiet, modest sort of a young man. Seeing I was a stranger (which I thought it just as well to appear to be) he told me the names of the actors on the stage, and we got into conversation. When the play was over we came out together, and I said, 'We've been very companionable and agreeable, and perhaps you wouldn't object to a drain?' 'Well, you're very good,' says he; 'I shouldn't object to a drain.' Accordingly we went to a public-house, near the theater, sat ourselves down in a quiet room upstairs on the first floor, and called for a pint of half-and-half apiece and a pipe.

"Well, sir, we put our pipes aboard, and we drank our half-and-half, and sat a-talking, very sociably, when the young man says, 'You must excuse me stopping very long,' he says, 'because I'm forced to go home in good time. I must be at work all night.' 'At work all night?' says I. 'You ain't a baker?' 'No,' he says, laughing, 'I ain't a baker.' 'I thought not,' says I, 'you haven't the looks of a baker.' 'No,' says he, 'I'm a glove-cleaner.'

"I never was more astonished in my life than when I heard them words come out of his lips. 'You're a glove-cleaner, are you?' says I. 'Yes,' he says, 'I am.' 'Then perhaps,' says I, taking the gloves out of my pocket, 'you can tell me who cleaned this pair of gloves? It's a rum story,' I says. 'I was dining over at Lambeth the other day at a free-and-easy—quite promiscuous—with a public company—when some gentleman, he left these gloves behind him! Another gentleman and me, you see, we laid a wager of a sovereign, that I wouldn't find out who they belonged to. I've spent as much as seven shillings already in trying to discover but if you could help me I'd stand another seven and welcome. You see there's Tʀ and a cross inside.' 'I see,' he says. 'Bless you, I know these gloves very well! I've seen dozens of pairs belonging to the same party.' 'No?' says I. 'Yes,' says he. 'Then you know who cleaned 'em?' says I. 'Rather so,' says he. 'My father cleaned 'em.'

" 'Where does your father live?' says I. 'Just round the corner,' says the young man, 'near Exeter Street, here. He'll tell you who they belong to directly.' 'Would you come round with me now?' says I. 'Certainly,' says he, 'but you needn't tell my father that you found me at the play, you know, because he mightn't like it.' 'All right!' We went round to the place, and there we found an old man in a white apron, with two or three daughters, all rubbing and cleaning away at lots of gloves in a front parlor. 'Oh, father!' says the young man, 'here's a person been and made a bet about the ownership of a pair of gloves, and I've told him you can settle it.' 'Good-evening, sir,' says I to the old gentleman. 'Here's the gloves your son speaks of. Letters Tʀ, you see, and a cross.' 'Oh, yes,' he says, 'I know these gloves very well; I've cleaned dozens of pairs of 'em. They belong to Mr. Trinkle, the great upholsterer in Cheapside.' 'Did you get 'em from Mr. Trinkle direct?' says I, 'if you'll excuse me asking the question.' 'No,' says he; 'Mr. Trinkle always sends 'em to Mr. Phibbs', the haberdasher's, opposite his shop, and the haberdasher sends 'em to me.' 'Perhaps you wouldn't object to a drain?' says I. 'Not in the least!' says he. So I took the old gentleman out, and had a little more talk with him and his son over a glass, and we parted excellent friends.

"This was late on a Saturday night. First thing on the Monday morning, I went to the haberdasher's shop, opposite Mr. Trinkle's, the great upholsterer's in Cheapside. 'Mr. Phibbs in the way?' 'My name is Phibbs.' 'Oh! I believe you sent this pair of gloves to be cleaned?' 'Yes, I did, for young Mr. Trinkle over the way. There he is in the shop!' 'Oh! that's him in the shop, is it? Him in the green coat?' 'The same individual.' 'Well, Mr. Phibbs, this is an unpleasant affair; but the fact is this: I am Inspector Wield, of the detective police, and I found these gloves under the pillow of the young woman that was murdered the other day, over in the Waterloo Road.' 'Good Heaven!' says he. 'He's a most respectable young man, and if his father were to hear of it, it would be the ruin of him!' 'I'm very sorry for it,' says I, 'but I must take him into custody.' 'Good Heaven!' says Mr. Phibbs again; 'can nothing be done?' 'Nothing,' says I. 'Will you allow me to call him over here,' says he, 'that his father may not see it done?' 'I don't object to that,' says I; 'but unfortunately, Mr. Phibbs, I can't allow of any communication between you. If any was attempted, I should have to interfere directly. Perhaps you'll beckon him over here?' Mr. Phibbs went to the door and beckoned, and the young fellow came across the street directly; a smart, brisk young fellow.

"'Good-morning, sir,' says I. 'Good-morning, sir,' says he. 'Would you allow me to inquire, sir,' says I, 'if you ever had any acquaintance with a party of the name of Grimwood?' 'Grimwood! Grimwood!' says he. 'No!' 'You know the Waterloo Road?' 'Oh! of course I know the Waterloo Road!' 'Happen to have heard of a young woman being murdered there?' 'Yes, I read it in the paper, and very sorry I was to read it.' 'Here's a pair of gloves belonging to you that I found under her pillow the morning afterward!'

"He was in a dreadful state, sir; a dreadful state! 'Mr. Wield,' he says, 'upon my solemn oath I never was there. I never so much as saw her, to my knowledge, in my life!' 'I am very sorry,' says I. 'To tell you the truth, I don't think you are the murderer, but I must take you to Union Hall in a cab. However,I think it's a case of that sort that at present, at all events, the magistrate will hear it in private.'

"A private examination took place, and then it came out that this young man was acquainted with a cousin of the unfortunate Eliza Grimwood, and that, calling to see her cousin a day or two before the murder, he left these gloves upon the table. Who should come in, shortly afterward, but Eliza Grimwood! 'Whose gloves are these?' she says, taking 'em up. 'Those are Mr. Trinkle's gloves,' says her cousin. 'Oh!' says she, 'they are very dirty, and of no use to him, I am sure. I shall take 'em away for my girl to clean the stoves with.' And she put 'em in her pocket. The girl had used 'em to clean the stoves, and I have no doubt had left 'em lying on the bedroom mantelpiece, or on the drawers, or somewhere; and her mistress, looking round to see that the room was tidy, had caught em' up and put 'em under the pillow where I found 'em.

"That's the story, sir."

II.—The Artful Touch.

"One of the most beautiful things that ever was done, perhaps," said Inspector Wield, emphasizing the adjective as preparing us to expect dexterity or ingenuity rather than strong interest, "was a move of Sergeant Witchem's. It was a lovely idea!

"Witchem and me were down at Epsom one Derby day, waiting at the station for the swell mob. As I mentioned when we were talking about these things before, we are ready at the station when there's races, or an agricultural show, or a chancellor sworn in for a university, or Jenny Lind, or anything of that sort; and as the swell mob come down we send 'em back again by the next train. But some of the swell mob, on the occasion of this Derby that I refer to, so far kidded us as to hire a horse and shay; start away from London by Whitechapel and miles round; come into Epsom from the opposite direction; and go to work, right and left, on the course, while we were waiting for 'em at the rail. That, however, ain't the point of what I'm going to tell you.

"While Witchem and me were waiting at the station, there comes up one Mr. Tatt, a gentleman formerly in the public line, quite an amateur detective in his way, and very much respected. 'Halloo, Charley Wield,' he says. 'What are you doing here? On the lookout for some of your old friends?' 'Yes, the old move, Mr. Tatt.' 'Come along,' he says, 'you and Witchem, and have a glass of sherry.' 'We can't stir from the place,' says I, 'till the next train comes in; but after that we will with pleasure.' Mr. Tatt waits, and the train comes in, and then Witchem and me go off with him to the hotel. Mr. Tatt he's got up quite regardless of expense for the occasion; and in his shirt front there's a beautiful diamond prop, cost him £15 or £20—a very handsome pin indeed. We drink our sherry at the bar, and have had our three or four glasses, when Witchem cries suddenly, 'Look out, Mr. Wield!' stand fast, and a dash is made into the place by the swell mob—four of 'em—that have come down as I tell you, and in a moment Mr. Tatt's prop is gone! Witchem he cuts 'em off at the door, I lay about me as hard as I can, Mr. Tatt shows fight like a good 'un, and there we are, all down together, heads and heels, knocking about on the floor of the bar—perhaps you never see such a scene of confusion! However, we stick to our men (Mr. Tatt being as good as any officer), and we take 'em all and carry 'em off to the station. The station's full of people who have been took on the course; and it's a precious piece of work to get 'em secured. However, we do it at last, and we search 'em; but nothing's found on 'em and they're locked up; and a pretty state of heat we are in by that time, I assure you!

"I was very blank over it, myself, to think that the prop had been passed away; and I said to Witchem, when we had set 'em to rights and were cooling ourselves along with Mr. Tatt, 'we don't take much by this move, anyway, for nothing's found upon 'em, and it's only the braggadocio,* after all.' 'What do you mean, Mr. Wield?' says Witchem. 'Here's the diamond pin!' and in the palm of his hand there it was, safe and sound! 'Why, in the name of wonder,' says me and Mr. Tatt, in astonishment, 'how did you come by that?' 'I'll tell you how I come by it,' says he. 'I saw which of 'em took it; and when we were all down on the floor together, knocking about, I just gave him a little touch on the back of his hand, as I knew his pal would; and he thought it was his pal and gave it me!' It was beautiful, beautiful!

"Even that was hardly the best of the case, for that chap was tried at the Quarter Sessions at Guildford. You know what Quarter Sessions are, sir. Well, if you'll believe me, while them slow justices were looking over the acts of Parliament to see what they could do to him, I'm blowed if he didn't cut out of the dock before their faces! He cut out of the dock, sir, then and there, swam across a river, and got up into a tree to dry himself. In the tree he was took—an old woman having seen him climb up—and Witchem's artful touch transported him!"

III.—THE SOFA.

"WHAT young men will do sometimes to ruin themselves and break their friends' hearts," said Sergeant Dornton, "it's surprising! I had a case at St. Blank's Hospital which was of this sort. A bad case, indeed, with a bad end!

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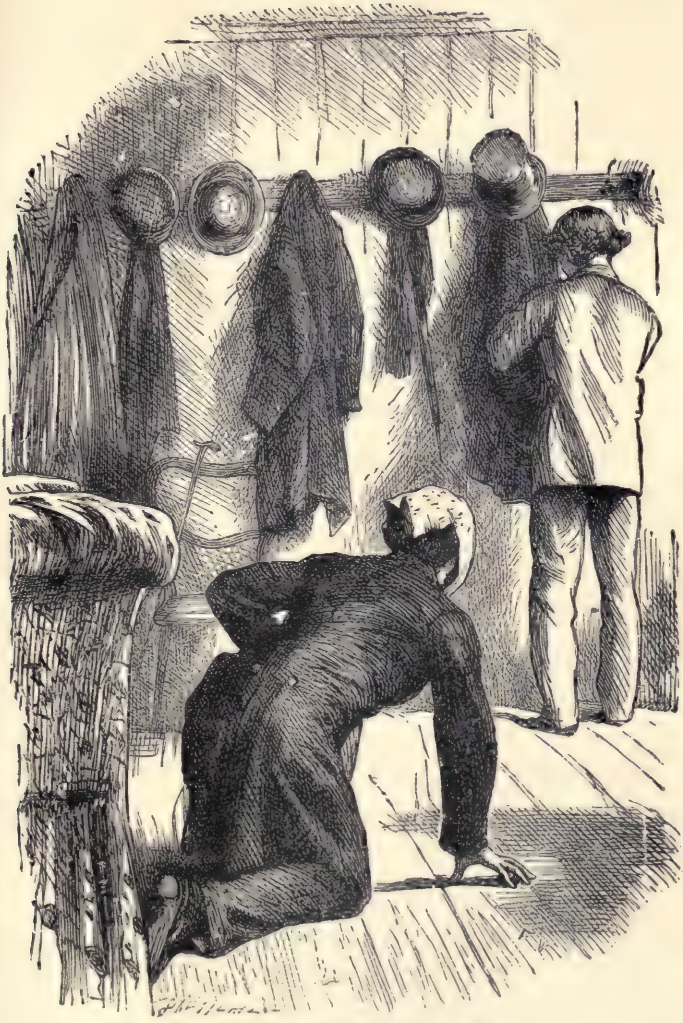
* Three months' imprisonment as reputed thieves.



C.S. "DETECTIVE" STORY—"THE SOFA."

"The secretary, and the house surgeon, and the treasurer of St. Blank's Hospital came to Scotland Yard to give information of numerous robberies having been committed on the students. The sudents could leave nothing in the pockets of their great-coats while the great-coats were hanging at the hospital but it was almost certain to be stolen. Property of various descriptions was constantly being lost; and the gentlemen were naturally uneasy about it, and anxious, for the credit of the institution, that the thief or thieves should be discovered. The case was intrusted to me and I went to the hospital.

"'Now, gentlemen,' said I, after we had talked it over, 'I understand this property is usually lost from one room.'

"Yes, they said. It was.

"'I should wish, if you please,' said I, 'to see the room.'

"It was a good-sized bare room down stairs, with a few tables and forms in it, and a row of pegs all round for hats and coats.

"'Next, gentlemen,' said I, 'do you suspect anybody?'

"Yes, they said. They did suspect somebody. They were sorry to say, they suspected one of the porters.

"'I should like,' said I, 'to have that man pointed out to me, and to have a little time to look after him.'

"He was pointed out and I looked after him, and then I went back to the hospital and said, 'Now, gentlemen, it's not the porter. He's, unfortunately for himself, a little too fond of drink, but he's nothing worse. My suspicion is that these robberies are committed by one of the students; and if you'll put me a sofa into that room where the pegs are—as there's no closet—I think I shall be able to detect the thief. I wish the sofa, if you please, to be covered with chintz, or something of that sort, so that I may lie on my chest underneath it without being seen.'

"The sofa was provided, and next day at eleven o'clock, before any of the students came, I went there with those gentlemen to get underneath it. It turned out to be one of those old-fashioned sofas with a great cross-beam at the bottom that would have broken my back in no time if I could ever have got below it. We had quite a job to break all this away in the time; however, I fell to work and they fell to work, and we broke it out and made a clear place for me. I got under the sofa, lay down on my chest, took out my knife, and made a convenient hole in the chintz to look through. It was then settled between me and the gentlemen that when the students were all up in the wards, one of the gentlemen should come in and hang up a great-coat on one of the pegs. And that the great-coat should have in one of the pockets a pocket-book containing marked money.

"After I had been there some time the students began to drop into the room by ones, and twos, and threes, and to talk about all sorts of things, little thinking there was anybody under the sofa—and then to go up stairs. At last there came in one who remained until he was alone in the room by himself. A tallish, good-looking young man of twenty-one or twenty-two with a light whisker. He went to a particular hat-peg, took off a good hat that was hanging there, tried it on, hung his own hat in its place, and hung that hat on another peg, nearly opposite to me. I then felt quite certain that he was the thief and would come back by and by.

"When they were all upstairs the gentleman came in with the great-coat. I showed him where to hang it so that I might have a good view of it, and he went away; and I lay under the sofa on my chest for a couple of hours or so waiting.

"At last the same young man came down. He walked across the room, whistling—stopped and listened—took another walk and whistled—stopped again and listened—then began to go regularly round the pegs, feeling in the pockets of all the coats. When he came to the great-coat and felt the pocket-book, he was so eager and so hurried that he broke the strap in tearing it open. As he began to put the money in his pocket I crawled out from under the sofa, and his eyes met mine.

"My face, as you may perceive, is brown now, but it was pale at that time, my health not being good, and looked as long as a horse's. Besides which, there was a great draught of air from the door, underneath the sofa, and I had tied a handkerchief round my head; so what I looked like altogether I don't know. He turned blue—literally blue—when he saw me crawling out, and I couldn't feel surprised at it.

"'I am an officer of the detective police,' said I, 'and have been lying here since you first came in this morning. I regret, for the sake of yourself and your friends, that you should have done what you have; but this case is complete. You have the pocket-book in your hand and the money upon you; and I must take you into custody!'

"It was impossible to make out any case in his behalf, and on his trial he pleaded guilty. How or when he got the means I don't know; but while he was awaiting his sentence he poisoned himself in Newgate."

We inquired of this officer, on the conclusion of the foregoing anecdote, whether the time appeared long or short when he lay in that constrained position under the sofa.

"Why, you see, sir," he replied, "If he hadn't come in the first time and I had not been quite sure he was the thief and would return, the time would have seemed long. But as it was, I being dead certain of my man, the time seemed pretty short."

ON DUTY WITH INSPECTOR FIELD.

How goes the night? Saint Giles' clock is striking nine. The weather is dull and wet and the long lines of street-lamps are blurred, as if we saw them through tears. A damp wind blows and rakes the pieman's fire out when he opens the door of his little furnace, carrying away an eddy of sparks.

Saint Giles' clock strikes nine. We are punctual. Where is Inspector Field? Assistant commissioner of police is always here, enwrapped in oil-skin cloak and standing in the shadow of Saint Giles' steeple. Detective ergeant, weary of speaking French all day to foreigners unpacking at the great exhibition, is already here. Where is Inspector Field?

Inspector Field is to-night the guardian genius of the British Museum. He is bringing his shrewd eye to bear on every corner of its solitary galleries before he reports "all right." Suspicious of the Elgin marbles, and not to be done by cat-faced Egyptian giants with their hands upon their knees, Inspector Field, sagacious, vigilant, lamp in hand, throwing monstrous shadows on the walls and ceilings, passes through the spacious rooms. If a mummy trembled in an atom of its dusty covering, Inspector Field would say, "Come out of that, Tom Green. I know you!" If the smallest "Gonoph" about town were crouching at the bottom of a classic bath, Inspector Field would nose him with a finer scent than the ogre's when adventurous Jack lay trembling in his kitchen copper. But all is quiet, and Inspector Field goes warily on, making little outward show of attending to anything in particular, just recognizing the ichthyosaurus as a familiar acquaintance, and wondering, perhaps, how the detectives did it in the days before the Flood.

Will Inspector Field be long about this work? He may be half an hour longer. He sends his compliments by police constable, and proposes that we meet at Saint Giles' Station House, across the road. Good. It were as well to stand by the fire there as in the shadow of Saint Giles' steeple.

Anything doing here to-night? Not much. We are very quiet. A lost boy, extremely calm and small, sitting by the fire, whom we now confide to a constable to take home, for the child says that if you show him Newgate Street he can show you where he lives—a raving drunken woman in the cells who has screeched her voice away and has hardly power enough left to declare, even with the passionate help of her feet and arms, that she is the daughter of a British officer, and, strike her blind and dead, but she'll write a letter to the queen! but who is soothed with a drink of water—in another cell, a quiet woman with a child at her breast, for begging—in another, her husband in a smock-frock, with a basket of watercresses—in another, a pickpocket—in another, a meek, tremulous old pauper man who has been out for a holiday "and has took but a little drop, but it has overcome him after so many months in the house"—and that's all as yet. Presently a sensation at the station-house door. Mr. Field, gentlemen!

Inspector Field comes in, wiping his forehead, for he is of a burly figure, and has come fast from the ores and metals of the deep mines of the earth, and from the parrot gods of the South Sea Islands, and from the birds and beetles of the tropics, and from the arts of Greece and Rome, and from the sculptures of Nineveh, and from the traces of an elder world when these were not. Is Rogers ready? Rogers is ready, strapped and great-coated, with a flaming eye in the middle of his waist, like a deformed Cyclops. Lead on, Rogers, to Rats' Castle!

How many people may there be in London who, if we had brought them deviously and blindfold to this street, fifty paces from the station house and within call of Saint Giles' Church, would know it for a not remote part of the city in which their lives are passed? How many who, amid this compound of sickening smells, these heaps of filth, these tumbling houses, with all their vile contents, animate, and inanimate, slimily overflowing into the back road, would believe that they breathe this air? How much red tape may there be that could look round on the faces which now hem us in—for our appearance here has caused a rush from all points to a common center—the lowering foreheads, the sallow cheeks, the brutal eyes, the matted hair, the infected, vermin-haunted heaps of rags—and say "I have thought of this. I have not dismissed the thing. I have neither blustered it away, nor frozen it away, nor tied it up and put it away, nor smoothly said pooh! pooh! to it when it has been shown to me"?

This is not what Rogers wants to know, however. What Rogers wants to know is whether you will clear the way here, some of you, or whether you won't; because if you don't do it right on end he'll lock you up! What! You are there, are you, Bob Miles? You haven't had enough of it yet, haven't you? You want three months more, do you? Come away from that gentleman! What are you creeping round there for?"

"What am I a-doing, thin, Mr. Rogers?" says Bob Miles, appearing, villainous, at the end of a lane of light made by the lantern.

"I'll let you know pretty quick if you don't hook it. Will you hook it?"

A sycophantic murmur rises from the crowd. "Hook it, Bob, when Mr. Rogers and Mr. Field tells you! Why don't you hook it when you are told to?"

The most importunate of the voices strikes familiarly on Mr. Rogers' ear. He suddenly turns his lantern on the owner.

"What! You are there, are you, Mr. Click? You hook it too—come!"

"What for?" says Mr. Click, discomfited.

"You hook it, will you?" says Mr. Rogers, with stern emphasis.

Both Click and Miles do "hook it" without another word, or, in plainer English, sneak away.

"Close up there, my men!" says Inspector Field to two constables on duty who have followed. "Keep together, gentlemen; we are going down here. Heads!"

Saint Giles' Church strikes half-past ten. We stoop low and creep down a precipitous flight of steps into a dark, close cellar. There is a fire. There is a long deal table. There are benches. The cellar is full of company, chiefly very young men in various conditions of dirt and raggedness. Some are eating supper. There are no girls or women present. Welcome to Rats' Castle, gentlemen, and to this company of noted thieves!

"Well, my lads! How are you, my lads? What have you been doing to-day? Here's some company come to see you, my lads! There's a plate of beefsteak, sir, for the supper of a fine young man! And there's a mouth for a steak, sir! Why, I should be too proud of such as that if I had it myself! Stand up and show it, sir! Take off your cap. There's a fine young man for a nice little party, sir! Ain't he?"

Inspector Field is the bustling speaker. Inspector Field's eye is the roving eye that searches every corner of the cellar as he talks. Inspector Field's hand is the well-known hand that has collared half the people here and motioned their brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, male and female friends, inexorably to New South Wales. Yet Inspector Field stands in this den, the sultan of the place. Every thief here cowers before him like a schoolboy before his schoolmaster. All watch him, all answer when addressed, all laugh at his jokes, all seek to propitiate him. This cellar company alone—to say nothing of the crowd surrounding the entrance from the street above and making the steps shine with eyes—is strong enough to murder us all and willing enough to do it; but let Inspector Field have a mind to pick out one thief here and take him; let him produce that ghostly truncheon from his pocket and say with his business air, "My lad, I want you!" and all Rats' Castle shall be stricken with paralysis, and not a finger move against him as he fits the handcuffs on!

Where's the Earl of Warwick? Here he is, Mr. Field! Here's the Earl of Warwick, Mr. Field! Oh, there you are, my lord. Come for'ard. There's a chest, sir, not to have a clean shirt on. Ain't it? Take your hat off, my lord. Why, I should be ashamed if I was you—and an earl, too—to show myself to a gentleman with my hat on! The Earl of Warwick laughs and uncovers. All the company laugh. One pickpocket, especially, laughs with great enthusiasm. Oh, what a jolly game it is when Mr. Field comes down—and don't want nobody.

So, you are here, too, are you, you tall, gray, soldierly-looking, grave man, standing by the fire? Yes, sir. Good-evening, Mr. Field! Let us see. You lived servant to a nobleman once? Yes, Mr. Field. And what is it you do now? I forget. Well, Mr. Field, I job about as well as I can. I left my employment on account of delicate health. The family is still kind to me. Mr. Wix, of Piccadilly, is also very kind to me when I am hard up. Likewise Mr. Nix, of Oxford Street. I get a trifle from them occasionally and rub on as well as I can, Mr. Field. Mr. Field's eye rolls enjoyingly, for this man is a notorious begging-letter writer. Good-night, my lads! Good-night, Mr. Field, and thank'ee sir!

Clear the street here, half a thousand of you! Cut it, Mrs. Stalker—none of that—we don't want you! Rogers of the flaming eye, lead on to the tramps' lodging-house!

A dream of baleful faces attends to the door. Now, stand back all of you! In the rear detective sergeant plants himself, composedly whistling, with his strong right arm across the narrow passage. Mrs. Stalker, I am something that need not be written here if you won't get yourself into trouble in about half a minute if I see that face of yours again!

Saint Giles' Church clock, striking eleven, hums through our hand from the dilapidated door of a dark outhouse as we open it and are stricken back by the pestilent breath that issues from within. Rogers to the front with the light and let us look!

Ten, twenty, thirty—who can count them! Men, women, children, for the most part naked, heaped upon the floor like maggots in a cheese! Ho! In that dark corner yonder! Does anybody lie there? Me, sir, Irish me, a widder, with six children. And yonder? Me, sir, Irish me, with me wife and eight poor babes. And to the left there? Me, sir, Irish me, along with two more Irish boys as is me friends. And to the right there? Me, sir, and the Murphy fam'ly numbering five blessed souls. And what's this coiling now about my foot? Another Irish me, pitifully in want of shaving, whom I have awakened from sleep—and across my other foot lies his wife—and by the shoes of Inspector Field lie their three eldest—and their three youngest are at present squeezed between the open door and the wall. And why is there no one on that little mat before the sullen fire? Because O'Donovan, with his wife and daughter, is not come in from selling lucifers! Nor on the bit of sacking in the nearest corner? Bad luck! Because that Irish family is late to-night a-cadging in the streets!

They are all awake now, the children excepted, and most of them sit up, to stare. Wheresoever Mr. Rogers turns the flaming eye, there is a spectral figure rising, unshrouded, from a grave of rags. Who is the landlord here? I am, Mr. Field! says a bundle of ribs and parchment against the wall, scratching itself. Will you spend this money fairly in the morning to buy coffee for 'em all? Yes, sir, I will! Oh, he'll do it, sir, he'll do it fair. He's honest! cry the specters. And with thanks and good-night sink into their graves again.

Thus we make our new Oxford streets, and our other new streets, never heeding, never asking, where the wretches whom we clear out crowd. With such scenes at our doors, with all the plagues of Egypt tied up with bits of cobweb in kennels so near our homes, we timorously make our nuisance bills and boards of health nonentities, and think to keep away the wolves of crime and filth, by our electioneering ducking to little vestrymen and our gentlemanly handling of red tape!

Intelligence of the coffee-money has got abroad. The yard is full, and Rogers of the flaming eye is beleagured with entreaties to show other lodging-houses. Mine next! Mine! Mine! Rogers, military, obdurate, stiff-necked, immovable, replies not, but leads away; and falling back before him. Inspector Field follows. Detective sergeant, with his barrier of arm across the little passage, deliberately waits to close the procession. He sees behind him without any effort, and exceedingly disturbs one individual far in the rear by coolly calling out, "It won't do Mr. Michael! Don't try it!"

After council holden in the street, we enter other lodging-houses, public-houses, many lairs and holes; all noisome and offensive; none so filthy and so crowded as where Irish are. In one the Ethiopian party are expected home presently—were in Oxford Street when last heard of—shall be fetched, for our delight, within ten minutes. In another, one of the two or three professors who draw Napoleon Bonaparte and a couple of mackerel on the pavement, and then let the work of art out to a speculator, is refreshing after his labors. In another, the vested interest of the profitable nuisance has been in one family for a hundred years, and the landlord drives in comfortably from the country to his snug little stew in town. In all, Inspector Field is received with warmth. Coiners and smashers droop before him; pickpockets defer to him; the gentle sex (not very gentle here) smile upon him. Half-drunken hags check themselves in the midst of pots of beer or pints of gin to drink to Mr. Field, and pressingly to ask the honor of his finishing the draught. One beldame in rusty black has such admiration for him, that she runs a whole street's length to shake him by the hand; tumbling into a heap of mud by the way, and still pressing her attentions when her very form had ceased to be distinguishable through it. Before the power of the law, the power of superior sense—for common thieves are fools beside these men—and the power of a perfect mastery of their character, the garrison of Rats' Castle and the adjacent fortresses make but a skulking show indeed when reviewed by Inspector Field.

Saint Giles' clock says it will be midnight in half an hour, and Inspector Field says we must hurry to the Old Mint in the Borough. The cab-driver is low-spirited and has a solemn sense of his responsibility. Now, what's your fare, my lad? Oh you know, Inspector Field. What's the good of asking me!

Say, Parker, strapped and great-coated and waiting in dim Borough doorway by appointment, to replace the trusty Rogers, whom we left deep in Saint Giles', are you ready? Ready, Inspector Field, and at a motion of my wrist behold my flaming eye.

This narrow street, sir, is the chief part of the Old Mint, full of low lodging-houses, as you see by the transparent canvas lamps and blinds announcing beds for travelers!

But it is greatly changed, friend Field, from my former knowledge of it; it is infinitely quieter and more subdued than when I was here last, some seven years ago? Oh, yes! Inspector Haynes, a first-rate man, is on this station now and plays the devil with them!

Well, my lads! How are you to-night, my lads? Playing cards here, eh? Who wins? Why, Mr. Field, I, the sulky gentleman with the damp flat side curls, rubbing my bleared eye with the end of my neckerchief, which is like a dirty eelskin, am losing just at present, but I suppose I must take my pipe out of my mouth and be submissive to you—I hope I see you well, Mr. Field? Ay, all right, my lad. Deputy, who have you got upstairs? Be pleased to show the rooms!

Why Deputy, Inspector Field can't say. He only knows that the man who takes care of the beds and lodgers is always called so. Steady, O Deputy, with the flaring candle in the blacking-bottle, for this is a slushy back yard, and the wooden staircase outside the house creaks and has holes in it.

Again, in these confined, intolerable rooms, burrowed out like the holes of rats or the nests of insect vermin, but fuller of intolerable smells, are crowds of sleepers, each on his foul truckle-bed coiled up beneath a rug. Halloo here! Come! Let us see you! Show your face! Pilot Parker goes from bed to bed and turns their slumbering heads toward us as a salesman might turn sheep. Some wake up with an execration and a threat. What! who speaks? Oh! If it's the accursed glaring eye that fixes me, go where I will, I am helpless. Here! I sit up to be looked at. Is it me you want? Not you; lie down again! and I lie down with a woeful growl.

Wherever the turning lane of light becomes stationary for a moment, some sleeper appears at the end of it, submits himself to be scrutinized, and fades away into the darkness.

There should be strange dreams here, Deputy. They sleep sound enough, says Deputy, taking the candle out of the blacking-bottle, snuffing it with his fingers, throwing the snuff into the bottle, and corking it up with the candle; that's all I know. What is the inscription, Deputy, on all the discolored sheets? A precaution against loss of linen. Deputy turns down the rug of an unoccupied bed and discloses it. "Stop Thief!"

To lie at night wrapped in the legend of my slinking life; to take the cry that pursues me, walking, to my breast in sleep; to take it staring at me and clamoring for me as soon as consciousness returns; to have it for my first-foot on New Year's Day, my valentine, my birthday salute, my Christmas greeting, my parting with the old year. Stop thief!

And to know that I must be stopped, come what will. To know that I am no match for this individual energy and keenness or this organized and steady system! Come across the street, here, and entering by a little shop and yard, examine these intricate passages and doors, contrived for escape, flapping and counter-flapping, like the lids of the conjuror's boxes. But what avail they? Who gets in by a nod and shows their secret working to us? Inspector Field.

Don't forget the old farm house, Parker! Parker is not the man to forget it. We are going there now. It is the old manor house of these parts, and stood in the country once. Then, perhaps, there was something, which was not the beastly street, to see from the shattered low fronts of the overhanging wooden houses we are passing under—shut up now, pasted over with bills about the literature and drama of the Mint and moldering away. This long paved yard was a paddock or a garden once, or a court in front of the farm house. Perchance with a dovecot in the center and fowls pecking about—with fair elm trees, then, where discolored chimney-stacks are now—noisy, then, with rooks which have yielded to a different sort of rookery. It's likelier than not, Inspector Field thinks as we turn into the common kitchen, which is in the yard and many paces from the house.

Well, my lads and lasses, how are you all? Where's Blackey, who has stood near London Bridge these twenty-five years, with a painted skin to represent disease? Here he is, Mr. Field! How are you, Blackey? Jolly, sa! Not playing the fiddle to-night, Blackey. Not a night, sa! A sharp, smiling youth, the wit of the kitchen, interposes. He ain't musical to-night, sir. I've been giving him a moral lecture; I've been a-talking to him about his latter end, you see. A good many of these are my pupils, sir. This here young man (smoothing down the hair of one near him, reading a Sunday paper) is a pupil of mine.

I'm a-teaching of him to read, sir. He's a promising cove, sir. He's a smith, he is, and gets his living by the sweat of his brow, sir. So do I, myself, sir. This young woman is my sister, Mr. Field. She's getting on very well, too. I've a deal of trouble with 'em, sir, but I'm richly rewarded, now I see 'em all doing so well and growing up so creditable. That's a great comfort, that is, ain't it, sir? In the midst of the kitchen (the whole kitchen is in ecstasies with this impromptu "chaff") sits a young, modest, gentle-looking creature, with a beautiful child in her lap. She seems to belong to the company, but is so strangely unlike it. She has such a pretty, quiet face and voice, and is so proud to hear the child admired—thinks you would hardly believe that he is only nine months old! Is she as bad as the rest, I wonder? Inspectorial experience does not engender a belief contrariwise, but prompts the answer, Not a ha'porth of difference!

Their is a piano going in the old farm house as we approach. It stops. Landlady appears. Has no objections, Mr. Field, to gentlemen being brought, but wishes it were at earlier hours, the lodgers complaining of ill-conwenience. Inspector Field is polite and soothing—knows his woman and the sex. Deputy (a girl in this case) shows the way up a heavy broad old staircase, kept very clean, into clean rooms where many sleepers are, and where painted panels of an older time look strangely on the truckle beds. The sight of whitewash and the smell of soap—two things we seem by this time to have parted from in infancy—make the old Farm House a phenomenon and connect themselves with the so curiously misplaced picture of the pretty mother and child long after we have left it—long after we have left, besides, the neighboring nook with something of a rustic flavor in it yet, where once, beneath a low wooden colonnade still standing as of yore, the eminent Jack Sheppard condescended to regale himself, and where, now, two old bachelor brothers in broad hats (who are whispered in the Mint to have made a compact long ago that if either should ever marry, he must forfeit his share of the joint property) still keep a sequestered tavern, and sit o' nights smoking pipes in the bar, among ancient bottles and glasses, as our eyes behold them.

How goes the night now? Saint George of Southwark answers with twelve blows upon his bell. Parker, good-night, for Williams is already waiting over in the region of Ratcliffe Highway, to show the houses where the sailors dance.

I should like to know where Inspector Field was born. In Ratcliffe Highway. I would have answered with confidence, but for his being equally at home wherever we go. He does not trouble his head, as I do, about the river at night. He does not care for its creeping, black and silent, on our right there, rushing through sluice-gates, lapping at piles and posts and iron rings, hiding strange things in its mud, running away with suicides and accidentally drowned bodies faster than midnight funeral should, and acquiring such various experience between its cradle and its grave. It has no mystery for him. Is there not the Thames Police!

Accordingly, Williams leads the way. We are a little late, for some of the houses are already closing. No matter. You show us plenty. All the landlords know Inspector Field. All pass him, freely and good-humoredly, wheresoever he wants to go. So thoroughly are all these houses open to him and our local guide that, granting that sailors must be entertained in their own way—as I suppose they must, and have a right to be—I hardly know how such places could be better regulated. Not that I call the company very select or the dancing very graceful—even so graceful as that of the German Sugar Bakers, whose assembly by the Minories we stopped to visit—but there is watchful maintenance of order in every house, and swift expulsion where need is. Even in the midst of drunkenness, both of the lethargic kind and the lively, there is sharp landlord supervision, and pockets are in less peril than out of doors. These houses show, singularly, how much of the picturesque and romantic there truly is in the sailor, requiring to be especially addressed. All the songs (sung in a hailstorm of halfpence, which are pitched at the singer without the least tenderness for the time or tune—mostly from great rolls of copper carried for the purpose—and which he occasionally dodges like shot as they fly near his head) are of the sentimental sea sort. All the rooms are decorated with nautical subjects. Wrecks, engagements, ships on fire, ships passing lighthouses on iron-bound coasts, ships blowing up, ships going down, ships running ashore, men lying out upon the main yard in a gale of wind, sailors and ships in every variety of peril, constitute the illustrations of fact. Nothing can be done in the fanciful way without a thumping boy upon a scaly dolphin.

How goes the night now? Past one. Black and Green are waiting in Whitechapel to unveil the mysteries of Wentworth Street. Williams, the best of friends must part. Adieu!

Are not Black and Green ready at the appointed place? Oh, yes! They glide out of shadow as we stop. Imperturbable Black opens the cab-door; imperturbable Green takes a mental note of the driver. Both Green and Black then open each his flaming eye and marshal us the way that we are going.

The lodging-house we want is hidden in a maze of streets and courts. It is fast shut. We knock at the door, and stand hushed looking up for a light at one or other of the begrimed old lattice windows in its ugly front, when another constable comes up—supposes that we want "to see the school." Detective sergeant meanwhile has got over a rail, opened a gate, dropped down an area, overcome some other little obstacles, and tapped at a window. Now returns. The landlord will send a deputy immediately.

Deputy is heard to stumble out of bed. Deputy lights a candle, draws back a bolt or two, and appears at the door. Deputy is a shivering shirt and trousers by no means clean, a yawning face, a shock head much confused externally and internally. We want to look for some one. You may go up with the light and take 'em all, if you like, says deputy, resigning it and sitting down upon a bench in the kitchen with his ten fingers sleepily twisting in his hair.

Halloo here! Now, then! Show yourselves. That'll do. It's not you. Don't disturb yourself any more! So on through a labyrinth of airless rooms, each man responding, like a wild beast, to the keeper who has tamed him and who goes into his cage. What, you haven't found him, then? says deputy when we came down. A woman mysteriously sitting up all night in the dark by the smoldering ashes of the kitchen fire says it's only tramps and cadgers here; it's gonophs over the way. A man, mysteriously walking about the kitchen all night in the dark, bids her hold her tongue. We come out. Deputy fastens the door and goes to bed again.

Black and Green, you know Bark, lodging-house keeper and receiver of stolen goods? Oh, yes, Inspector Field. Go to Bark's next.

Bark sleeps in an inner wooden hutch, near his street-door. As we parley on the step with Bark's Deputy, Bark growls in his bed. We enter, and Bark flies out of bed. Bark is a red villain and a wrathful, with a sanguine throat that looks very much as if it were expressly made for hanging, as he stretches it out, in pale defiance, over the half-door of his hutch. Bark's parts of speech are of an awful sort—principally adjectives. I won't, says Bark have no adjective police and adjective strangers in my adjective premises! I won't, by adjective and substantive! Give me my trousers, and I'll send the whole adjective police to adjective and substantive! Give me, says Bark, my adjective trousers! I'll put an adjective knife in the whole bileing of 'em. I'll punch their adjective heads. I'll rip up their adjective substantives. Give me my adjective trousers! says Bark, and I'll spile the bileing of 'em!

Now, Bark, what's the use of this? Here's Black and Green, Detective Sergeant, and Inspector Field. You know we will come in. I know you won't! says Bark. Somebody give me my adjective trousers! Bark's trousers seem difficult to find. He calls for them as Hercules might for his club. Give me my adjective trousers! says Bark, and I'll spile the bileing of 'em.

Inspector Field holds that it's all one whether Bark likes the visit or don't like it. He, Inspector Field, is an Inspector of the detective police, detective sergeant is detective sergeant, Black and Green are constables in uniform. Don't you be a fool, Bark, or you know it will be the worse for you. I don't care, says Bark. Give me my adjective trousers!

At two o'clock in the morning, we descend into Bark's low kitchen, leaving Bark to foam at the mouth above, and Imperturbable Black and Green to look at him. Bark's kitchen is crammed full of thieves, holding a conversazione there by lamp-light. It is by far the most dangerous assembly we have seen yet. Stimulated by the ravings of Bark, above, their looks are sullen, but not a man speaks. We ascend again. Bark has got his trousers, and is in a state of madness in the passage with his back against a door that shuts off the upper staircase. We observe, in other respects, a ferocious individuality in Bark. Instead of "Stop Thief!" on his linen, he prints "Stolen from Bark's!"

Now, Bark, we are going up stairs! No, you ain't! You refuse admission to the police, do you, Bark? Yes, I do! I refuse it to all the adjective police, and to all the adjective substantives. If the adjective coves in the kitchen was men, they'd come up now, and do for you! Shut me that there door! says Bark, and suddenly we are inclosed in the passage. They'd come up and do for you! cries Bark, and waits. Not a sound in the kitchen! They'd come up and do for you! cries Bark again, and waits. Not a sound in the kitchen! We are shut up, half-a-dozen of us, in Bark's house in the innermost recesses of the worst part of London, in the dead of the night—the house is crammed with notorious robbers and ruffians—and not a man stirs. No, Bark. They know the weight of the law, and they know Inspector Field and Co. too well.

We leave bully Bark to subside at leisure out of his passion and his trousers, and, I dare say, to be inconveniently reminded of this little brush before long. Black and Green do ordinary duty here, and look serious.

As to White, who waits on Holborn Hill to show the courts that are eaten out of Rotten Gray's Inn Lane, where other lodging-houses are, and where (in one blind alley) the thieves' kitchen and seminary for the teaching of the art to children, is, the night has so worn away, being now

> almost at odds with morning, which is which,

that they are quiet, and no light shines through the chinks in the shutters. As undistinctive death will come here, one day, sleep comes now. The wicked cease from troubling sometimes, even in this life.

DOWN WITH THE TIDE.

A VERY dark night it was, and bitter cold; the east wind blowing bleak, and bringing with it stinging particles from marsh, and moor, and fen—from the great desert and Old Egypt, may be. Some of the component parts of the sharp-edged vapor that came flying up the Thames at London might be mummy-dust, dry atoms from the Temple at Jerusalem, camels' foot-prints, crocodiles' hatching places, loosened grains of expression from the visages of blunt nosed sphynxes, waifs and strays from caravans of turbaned merchants, vegetation from jungles, frozen snow from the Himalayas. Oh! It was very dark upon the Thames, and it was bitter bitter cold.

"And yet," said the voice within the great pea-coat at my side, "you'll have seen a good many rivers too, I dare say?"

"Truly," said I, "when I come to think of it, not a few. From the Niagara, downward to the mountain rivers of Italy, which are like the national spirit—very tame, or chafing suddenly and bursting bounds, only to dwindle away again. The Moselle, and the Rhine, and the Rhone; and the Seine, and the Saone; and the St. Lawrence, Mississippi, and Ohio; and the Tiber, the Po, and the Arno; and the——"

Peacoat coughing as if he had had enough of that, I said no more. I could have carried the catalogue on to a teasing length, though, if I had been in the cruel mind.

"And after all," said he, "this looks so dismal?"

"So awful," I returned, "at night. The Seine at Paris is very gloomy, too, at such a time, and is probably the scene of far more crime and greater wickedness; but this river looks so broad and vast, so murky and silent, seems such an image of death in the midst of the great city's life, that——"

That Peacoat coughed again. He could not stand my holding forth.

We were in a four-oared Thames police galley, lying on our oars in the deep shadow of Southwark Bridge—under the corner arch on the Surrey side—having come down with the tide from Vauxhall. We were fain to hold on pretty tight, though close in shore, for the river was swollen and the tide running down very strong. We were watching certain water-rats of human growth, and lay in the deep shade as quiet as mice; our light hidden and our scraps of conversation carried on in whispers. Above us, the massive iron girders of the arch were faintly visible, and below us its ponderous shadow seemed to sink down to the bottom of the stream.

We had been lying here some half an hour. With our backs to the wind, it is true; but the wind being in a determined temper blew straight through us, and would not take the trouble to go round. I would have boarded a fireship to get into action, and mildly suggested as much to my friend Pea.

"No doubt," says he as patiently as possible; "but shore-going tactics wouldn't do with us. River thieves can always get rid of stolen property in a moment by dropping it overboard. We want to take them with the property, so we lurk about and come out upon 'em sharp. If they see or hear us, over it goes."

Pea's wisdom being indisputable, there was nothing for it but to sit there and be blown through, for another half hour. The water-rats thinking it wise to abscond at the end of that time without commission of felony, we shot out, disappointed, with the tide.

"Grim they look, don't they?" said Pea, seeing me glance over my shoulder at the lights upon the bridge, and downward at their long, crooked reflections in the river.

"Very," said I, "and make one think with a shudder of suicides. What a night for a dreadful leap from that parapet!"

"Ah, but Waterloo's the favorite bridge for making holes in the water from," returned Pea. "By the bye—avast pulling, lads! would you like to speak to Waterloo on the subject?"

My face confessing a surprised desire to have some friendly conversation with Waterloo Bridge, and my friend Pea being the most obliging of men, we put about, pulled out of the force of the stream, and in place of going at great speed with the tide began to strive against it, close in shore again. Every color but black seemed to have departed from the world. The air was black, the water was black, the barges and hulks were black, the piles were black, the buildings were black, the shadows were only a deeper shade of black upon a black ground. Here and there, a coal fire in an iron cresset blazed upon a wharf; but one knew that it too had been black a little while ago, and would be black again soon. Uncomfortable rushes of water suggestive of gurgling and drowning, ghostly rattlings of iron chains, dismal clankings of discordant engines, formed the music that accompanied the dip of our oars and their rattling in the rullocks. Even the noises had a black sound to me—as the trumpet sounded red to the blind man.

Our dextrous boat's crew made nothing of the tide, and pulled us gallantly up to Waterloo Bridge. Here Pea and I disembarked, passed under the black stone archway, and climbed the steep stone steps. Within a few feet of their summit, Pea presented me to Waterloo (or an eminent toll-taker representing that structure), muffled up to the eyes in a thick shawl, and amply great-coated and fur-capped.

Waterloo received us with cordiality, and observed of the night that it was "a searcher." He had been originally called the strand bridge, he informed us, but had received his present name at the suggestion of the proprietors, when Parliament had resolved to vote three hundred thousand pound for the erection of a monument in honor of the victory. Parliament took the hint (said Waterloo, with the least flavor of misanthropy) and saved the money. Of course the late Duke of Wellington was the first passenger, and of course he paid his penny, and of course a noble lord preserved it ever more. The treadle and index at the toll-house (a most ingenious contrivance for rendering fraud impossible), were invented by Mr. Lethbridge, then property-man at Drury Lane Theater.

Was it suicide we wanted to know about? said Waterloo. Ha! Well, he had seen a good deal of that work, he did assure us. He had prevented some. Why, one day a woman, poorish looking, came in between the hatch, slapped down a penny, and wanted to go on without the change! Waterloo suspected this, and says to his mate, "give an eye to the gate," and bolted after her. She had got to the third seat between the piers, and was on the parapet just a-going over, when he caught her and gave her in charge. At the police office next morning, she said it was along of trouble and a bad husband.

"Likely enough," observed Waterloo to Pea and myself, as he adjusted his chin in his shawl. "There's a deal of trouble about, you see—and bad husbands, too!"

Another time, a young woman at twelve o'clock in the open day, got through, darted along; and, before Waterloo could come near her, jumped upon the parapet, and shot herself over sideways. Alarm given, waterman put off, lucky escape. Clothes buoyed her up.

"This is where it is," said Waterloo. "If people jump off straight forward from the middle of the parapet of the bays of the bridge, they are seldom killed by drowning, but are smashed, poor things; that's what they are; they dash themselves upon the buttress of the bridge. But you jump off," said Watterloo to me, putting his forefinger in a button-hole of my great coat, "you jump off from the side of the bay, and you'll tumble, true, into the stream under the arch. What you have got to do, is to mind how you jump in! There was poor Tom Steele from Dublin. Didn't dive! Bless you, didn't dive at all! Fell down so flat into the water, that he broke his breastbone, and lived two days!"

I asked Waterloo if there were a favorite side of his bridge for this dreadful purpose? He reflected, and thought yes, there was. He should say the Surrey side.

Three decent looking men went through one day, soberly and quietly, and went on abreast for about a dozen yards: when the middle one, he sung out, all of a sudden, "Here goes, Jack!" and was over in a minute.

Body found? Well. Waterloo didn't rightly recollect about that. They were compositors, they were.

He considered it astonishing how quick people were! Why, there was a cab came up one Boxing-night, with a young woman in it, who looked, according to Waterloo's opinion of her, a little the worse for liquor; very handsome she was too—very handsome. She stopped the cab at the gate, and said she'd pay the cabman then, which she did, though there was a little hankering about the fare, because at first she didn't seem quite to know where she wanted to be drove to. However, she paid the man, and the toll too, and looking Waterloo in the face (he thought she knew him, don't you see!) said, "I'll finish it somehow!" Well, the cab went off, leaving Waterloo a little doubtful in his mind, and while it was going on at full speed the young woman jumped out, never fell, hardly staggered, ran along the bridge pavement a little way, passing several people, and jumped over from the second opening. At the inquest it was giv' in evidence that she had been quarreling at the Hero of Waterloo, and it was brought in jealousy. (One of the results of Waterloo's experience was, that there was a deal of jealousy about.

"Do we ever get madmen?" said Waterloo, in answer to an inquiry of mine. "Well, we do get madmen. Yes, we have had one or two; escaped from the 'sylums, I suppose. One hadn't a halfpenny; because I wouldn't let him through, he went back a little way, stooped down, took a run, and butted at the hatch like a ram. He smashed his hat rarely, but his head didn't seem no worse—in my opinion on account of his being wrong in it afore. Sometimes people haven't got a halfpenny. If they are really tired and poor we give 'em one and let 'em through. Other people will leave things—pocket handkerchiefs mostly. I have taken cravats and gloves, pocket-knives, tooth-picks, studs, shirt-pins, rings (generally from young gents early in the morning) but handkerchiefs is the general thing."

"Regular customers?" said Waterloo. "Lord yes! We have regular customers. One such a worn-out used-up old file as you can scarcely picter comes from the Surrey side as regular as ten o'clock at night comes; and goes over I think, to some flash house on the Middlesex side. He comes back, he does, as reg'lar as the clock strikes three in the morning, and then can hardly drag one of his old legs after the other. He always turns down the water-stairs, come up again, and then goes on down the Waterloo Road. He always does the same thing, and never varies a minute. Does it every night—even Sundays."

I asked Waterloo if he had given his mind to the possibility of this particular customer going down the water-stairs at three o'clock some morning, and never coming up again? He didn't think that of him, he replied. In fact, it was Waterloo's opinion, founded on his observation of that file, that he know'd a trick worth two of it.

"There's another queer old customer," said Waterloo, "comes over, as punctual as the almanac, at eleven o'clock on the sixth of January, at eleven o'clock on the fifth of April, at eleven o'clock on the sixth of July, at eleven o'clock on the tenth of October. Drives a shaggy little rough pony, in a sort of a rattle-trap arm-chair sort of a thing. White hair he has, and white whiskers, and muffles himself up with all manner of shawls. He comes back again the same afternoon, and we never seen more of him for three months. He is a captain in the navy—retired—wery old—wery odd—and served with Lord Nelson. He is particular about drawing his pension at Somerset House afore the clock strikes twelve every quarter. I have heerd say that he thinks it wouldn't be according to the Act of Parliament, if he didn't draw it afore twelve."

Having related these anecdotes in a natual manner, which was the best warranty in the world for their genuine nature, our friend Waterloo was sinking deep into his shawl again, as having exhausted his communicative powers and taken in enough east wind, when my other friend Pea in a moment brought him to the surface by asking whether he had not been occasionally the subject of assault and battery in the execution of his duty? Waterloo recovering his spirits, instantly dashed into a new branch of his subject. We learned how "both these teeth"—here he pointed to the places where two front teeth were not—were knocked out by an ugly customer who one night made a dash at him (Waterloo) while his (the ugly customer's) pal and coadjutor made a dash at the toll-taking apron where the money-pockets were; how Waterloo, letting the teeth go (to Blazes, he observed indefinitely), grappled with the apron-seizer, permitting the ugly one to run away; and how he saved the bank, and captured his man, and consigned him to fine and imprisonment. Also how, on another night, "a cove" laid hold of Waterloo, then presiding at the horse gate of his bridge, and threw him unceremoniously over his knee, having first cut his head open with his whip. How Waterloo "got right," and started after the cove all down the Waterloo Road, through Stamford Street, and round to the foot of Blackfriars Bridge, where the cove "cut into" a public-house. How Waterloo cut in too; but how an aider and abettor of the cove's, who happened to be taking a promiscuous drain at the bar, stopped Waterloo; and the cove cut out again, ran across the road down Holland Street, and where not, and into a beer-shop. How Waterloo breaking away from his detainer was close upon the cove's heels, attended by no end of people who, seeing him running with the blood streaming down his face, thought something worse was "up," and roared Fire! and Murder! on the hopeful chance of the matter in hand being one or both. How the cove was ignominiously taken, in a shed where he had run to hide, and how at the police court they at first wanted to make a sessions job of it; but eventually Waterloo was allowed to be "spoke to," and the Cove made it square with Waterloo by paying his doctor's bill (W. was laid up for a week) and giving him "Three, ten." Likewise we learned what we had faintly suspected before, that your sporting amateur on the Derby Day, albeit a captain, can be—"if he be," as Captain Bobadil observes, "so generously minded"—anything but a man of honor and a gentleman; not sufficiently gratifying his nice sense of humor by the witty scattering of flour and rotten eggs on obtuse civilians, but requiring the further excitement of "bilking the toll," and "pitching into" Waterloo, and "cutting him about the head with his whip;" finally being, when called upon to answer for the assault, what Waterloo described as "Minus," or, as I humbly conceived it, not to be found. Likewise did Waterloo inform us, in reply to my inquiries, admiringly and deferentially preferred through my friend Pea, that the takings at the bridge had more than doubled in amount since the reduction of the toll one-half. And being asked if the aforesaid takings included much bad money, Waterloo responded, with a look far deeper than the deepest part of the river, he should think not, and so retired into his shawl for the rest of the night.

Then did Pea and I once more embark in our four-oared galley, and glide swiftly down the river with the tide. And while the shrewd East rasped and notched us, as with jagged razors, did my friend Pea impart to me confidences of interest relating to the Thames police; we between whiles finding "duty boats" handing in dark corners under banks, like weeds—our own was a "supervision boat"—and they, as they reported "all right!" flashing their hidden light on us, and we flashing ours on them. These duty boats had one sitter in each: an inspector: and were rowed "Ran-dan," which—for the information of those who never graduated, as I was once proud to do, under a fireman-waterman and winner of

Kean's Prize Wherry: who, in the course of his tuition, took hundreds of gallons of rum and egg (at my expense) at the various houses of note above and below bridge; not by any means because he liked it, but to cure a weakness in his liver, for which the faculty had particularly recommended it—may be explained as rowed by three men, two pulling an oar each, and one a pair of sculls.

Thus, floating down our black highway, sullenly frowned upon by the knitted brows of Blackfriars, Southwark, and London, each in his lowering turn, I was shown by my friend Pea that there are, in the Thames police force, whose district extends from Battersea to Barking Creek, ninety-eight men, eight duty boats, and two supervision boats; and that these go about so silently, and lie in wait in such dark places, and so seem to be nowhere, and so may be anywhere, that they have gradually become a police prevention, keeping the river almost clear of any great crimes, even while the increased vigilance on shore has made it much harder than of yore to live by "thieving" in the streets. And as to the various kinds of water thieves, said my friend Pea, there were the tier-rangers, who silently dropped alongside the tiers of shipping in the pool, by night, and who, going to the companion head, listened for two snores—snore number one, the skipper's; snore number two, the mate's—mates and skippers always snoring great guns, and being dead sure to be hard at it if they had turned in and were asleep. Hearing the double fire, down went the rangers into the skippers' cabins; groped for the skippers' inexpressibles, which it was the custom of those gentlemen to shake off, watch, money, braces, boots, and all together, on the floor; and therewith made off as silently as might be. Then there were the lumpers, or laborers employed to unload vessels. They wore loose canvas jackets with a broad hem in the bottom, turned inside, so as to form a large circular pocket in which they could conceal, like clowns in pantomimes, packages of surprising sizes. A great deal of property was stolen in this manner (Pea confided to me) from steamers; first, because steamers carry a larger number of small packages than other ships; next, because of the extreme rapidity with which they are obliged to be unladen for their return voyages. The lumpers dispose of their booty easily to marine store dealers, and the only remedy to be suggested is that marine store shops should be licensed, and thus brought under the eye of the police as rigidly as public-houses. Lumpers also smuggle goods ashore for the crews of vessels. The smuggling of tobacco is so considerable, that it is well worth the while of the sellers of smuggled tobacco to use hydraulic presses, to squeeze a single pound into a package small enough to be contained in an ordinary pocket. Next, said my friend Pea, there were the truckers—less thieves than smugglers, whose business it was to land more considerable parcels of goods than the lumpers could manage. They sometimes sold articles of grocery and so forth, to the crews, in order to cloak their real calling, and get aboard without suspicion. Many of them had boats of their own, and made money. Besides these, there were the dredgermen, who, under pretence of dredging up coals and such like from the bottom of the river, hung about barges and other undecked craft, and when they saw an opportunity, threw any property they could lay their hands on overboard, in order slyly to dredge it up when the vessel was gone. Sometimes they dextrously used their dredges to whip away anything that might lie within reach. Some of them were mighty neat at this, and the accomplishment was called dry dredging. Then, there was a vast deal of property, such as copper nails, sheathing, hardwood, etc., habitually brought away by shipwrights and other workmen from their employers' yards, and disposed of to marine store dealers, many of whom escaped detection through hard swearing, and their extraordinary artful ways of accounting for the possession of stolen property. Likewise, there were special pleading practitioners, for whom barges "drifted away of their own selves"—they having no hand in it, except first cutting them loose, and afterward plundering them—innocents, meaning no harm, who had the misfortune to observe those foundlings wandering about the Thames.

We were now going in and out, with little noise and great nicety, among the tiers of shipping, whose many hulls, lying close together, rose out of the water like black streets. Here and there, a Scotch, an Irish, or a foreign steamer, getting up her steam as the tide made, looked with her great chimney and high sides, like a quiet factory among the common buildings. Now the streets opened into clearer spaces, now contracted into alleys; but the tiers were so like houses, in the dark, that I could almost have believed myself in the narrower byways of Venice. Everything was wonderfully still; for, it wanted full three hours of flood, and nothing seemed awake but a dog here and there.

So we took no tier-rangers captive, nor any lumpers, nor truckers, nor dredgermen, nor other evil-disposed person or persons; but went ashore at Wapping, where the old Thames police office is now a station-house, and where the old court, with its cabin windows looking on the river, is a quaint charge room: with nothing worse in it usually than a stuffed cat in a glass case, and a portrait, pleasant to behold, of a rare old Thames police officer, Mr. Superintendent Evans, now succeeded by his son. We looked over the charge books, admirably kept, and found the prevention so good that there were not five hundred entries (including drunken and disorderly) in a whole year. Then we looked into the store-room, where there was an oakum smell, and a nautical seasoning of dread-nought clothing, rope yarn, boat hooks, sculls and oars, spare stretchers, rudders, pistols, cutlasses, and the like. Then, into the cell, aired high up in the wooden wall through an opening like a kitchen plate-rack, wherein there was a drunken man, not at all warm, and very wishful to know if it were morning yet. Then, into a better sort of watch and ward room, where there was a squadron of stone bottles drawn up, ready to be filled with hot water and applied to any unfortunate creature who might be brought in apparently drowned. Finally we shook hands with our worthy friend Pea, and ran all the way to Tower Hill, under strong police suspicion occasionally, before we got warm.

A WALK IN THE WORK-HOUSE.

On a certain Sunday, I formed one of the congregation assembled in the chapel of a large metropolitan workhouse. With the exception of the clergyman and clerk, and a very few officials, there were none but paupers present. The children sat in the galleries; the women in the body of the chapel, and in one of the side aisles; the men in the remaining aisle. The service was decorously performed, though the sermon might have been much better adapted to the comprehension and to the circumstances of the hearers. The usual supplications were offered, with more than the usual significancy in such a place, for the fatherless children and widows, for all sick persons and young children, for all that were desolate and oppressed, for the comforting and helping of the weak-hearted, for the raising-up of them that had fallen; for all that were in danger, necessity and tribulation. The prayers of the congregation were desired "for several persons in the various wards dangerously ill;" and others who were recovering returned their thanks to Heaven.

Among this congregation were some evil-looking young women, and beetle-browed young men; but not many—perhaps that kind of characters kept away. Generally, the faces (those of the children excepted) were depressed and subdued, and wanted color. Aged people were there, in every variety. Mumbling, blear-eyed, spectacled, stupid, deaf, lame; vacantly winking in the gleams of sun that now and then crept in through the open doors from the paved yard; shading their listening ears, or blinking eyes, with their withered hands; poring over their books, leering at nothing, going to sleep, crouching and drooping in corners. There were weird old women, all skeleton within, all bonnet and cloak without, continually wiping their eyes with dirty dusters of pocket handkerchiefs; and there were ugly old crones, both male and female, with a ghastly kind of contentment upon them which was not at all comforting to see. Upon the whole, it was the dragon, Pauperism, in very weak and impotent condition; toothless, fangless, drawing his breath heavily enough, and hardly worth chaining up.

When the service was over I walked with the humane and conscientious gentleman whose duty it was to take that walk, that Sunday morning, through the little world of poverty enclosed within the workhouse walls. It was inhabited by a population of some fifteen hundred or two thousand paupers, ranging from the infant newly born or not yet come into the pauper world, to the old man dying on his bed.

In a room opening from a squalid yard, where a number of listless women were lounging to and fro, trying to get warm in the ineffectual sunshine of the tardy May morning—in the "Itch Ward," not to compromise the truth—a woman such as Hogarth has often drawn, was hurriedly getting on her gown before a dusty fire. She was the nurse, or wardswoman, of that insalubrious department—herself a pauper—flabby, rawboned, untidy—unpromising and course of aspect as need be. But, on being spoken to about the patients whom she had in charge, she turned round, with her shabby gown half on, half off, and fell a crying with all her might. Not for show, not querulously, not in any mawkish sentiment, but in the deep grief and affliction of her heart; turning away her dishevelled head; sobbing most bitterly, wringing her hands, and letting fall abundance of great tears that choked her utterance. What was the matter with the nurse of the itch-ward? Oh, "the dropped child" was dead! Oh, the child that was found in the street, and she had brought up ever since, had died an hour ago, and see where the little creature lay, beneath the cloth! The dear, the pretty dear!

The dropped child seemed too small and poor a thing for death to be in earnest with, but death had taken it; and already its diminutive form was nearly washed, composed, and stretched as if in sleep upon a box. I thought I heard a voice from Heaven saying, It shall be well for thee, O nurse of the itch-ward, when some less gentle pauper does those offices to thy cold form, that such as the dropped child are the angels who behold my Father's face!

In another room were several ugly old women crouching, witch-like, round a hearth, and chattering and nodding, after the manner of the monkeys. "All well here? And enough to eat?" A general chattering and chuckling; at last an answer from a volunteer. "Oh, yes, gentleman! Bless you, gentleman! Lord bless the Parish of St. So-and-So! It feed the hungry, sir, and give drink to the thusty, and it warm them which is cold, so it do, and good luck to the parish of St. So-and-So, and thankee gentleman!" Elsewhere, a party of pauper nurses were at dinner. "How do you get on?" "Oh pretty well, sir! We works hard, and we lives hard—like the sodgers!"

In another room, a kind of purgatory or place of transition, six or eight noisy madwomen were gathered together, under the superintendence of one sane attendant. Among them was a girl of two or three-and-twenty, very prettily dressed, of most respectable appearance, and good manners, who had been brought in from the house she had lived as domestic servant (having, I suppose, no friends), on account of being subject to epileptic fits, and requiring to be removed under the influence of a very bad one. She was by no means of the same stuff, or the same breeding, or the same experience, or in the same state of mind, as those by whom she was surrounded; and she pathetically complained that the daily association and the nightly noise made her worse, and was driving her mad—which was prefectly evident. The case was noted for inquiry and redress, but she said she had already been there for some weeks.

If this girl had stolen her mistress's watch, I do not hesitate to say she would have been infinitely better off. We have come to this absurd, this dangerous, this monstrous pass, that the dishonest felon is, in respect of cleanliness, order, diet, and accommodation, better provided for and taken care of, than the honest pauper.

And this conveys no special imputation on the workhouse of the parish of St. So-and-So, where, on the contrary, I saw many things to commend. It was very agreeable, recollecting that most infamous and atrocious enormity committed at Tooting—an enormity which, a hundred years hence, will still be vividly remembered in the by-ways of English life, and which has done more to engender a gloomy discontent and suspicion among many thousands of the people than all the Chartist leaders could have done in all their lives—to find the pauper children in this workhouse looking robust and well, and apparently the objects of very great care. In the infant school—a large, light, airy room at the top of the building—the little creatures, being at dinner, and eating their potatoes heartily, were not cowed by the presence of strange visitors, but stretched out their small hands to be shaken, with a very pleasant confidence. And it was comfortable to see two mangey pauper rocking-horses rampant in a corner. In the girl's school, where the dinner was also in process, everything bore a cheerful and healthy aspect. The meal was over, in the boys' school, by the time of our arrival there, and the room was not yet quite re-arranged; but the boys were roaming unrestrained about a large and airy yard, as any other schoolboys might have done. Some of them had been drawing large ships upon the school-room wall; and if they had a mast with shrouds and stays set up for practice (as they have in the Middlesex House of Correction), it would be so much the better. At present, if a boy should feel a strong impulse upon him to learn the art of going aloft, he could only gratify it, I presume, as the men and women paupers gratify their aspirations after better board and lodging, by smashing as many workhouse windows as possible, and being promoted to prison.

In one place, the Newgate of the workhouse, a company of boys and youths were locked up in a yard alone; their day room being a kind of kennel where the casual poor used formerly to be littered down at night. Divers of them had been there some long time. "Are they never going away?" was the natural inquiry. "Most of them are crippled, in some form or other," said the wardsman, "and not fit for anything." They slunk about, like dispirited wolves or hyenas; and made a pounce at their food when it was served out, much as those animals do. The big-headed idiot shuffling his feet along the pavement, in the sunlight outside, was a more agreeable object every way.

Groves of babies in arms; groves of mothers and other sick women in bed; groves of lunatics; jungles of men in stone-paved down stairs day-rooms, waiting for their dinners; longer and longer groves of old people, in up stairs infirmary wards, wearing out life, God knows how—this was the scenery through which the walk lay, for two hours. In some of these latter chambers, there were pictures stuck against the wall, and a neat display of crockery and pewter on a kind of sideboard; now and then it was a treat to see a plant or two; in almost every ward there was a cat.

In all of these long walks of aged and infirm, some old people were bedridden, and had been for a long time; some were sitting on their beds half-naked; some dying in their beds; some out of bed, and sitting at a table near the fire. A sullen or lethargic indifference to what was asked, a blunted sensibility to everything but warmth and food, a moody absence of complaint as being of no use, a dogged silence and resentful desire to be left alone again, I thought were generally apparent. On our walking into the midst of one of these dreary perspectives of old men, nearly the following little dialogue took place, the nurse not being immediately at hand:

"All well here?"

No answer. An old man in a Scotch cap sitting among others on a form at the table, eating out of a tin porringer, pushes back his cap a little to look at us, claps it down on his forehead again with the palm of his hand, and goes on eating.

"All well here?" (repeated.)

No answer. Another old man sitting on his bed, paralytically peeling a boiled potato, lifts his head and stares.

"Enough to eat?"

No answer. Another old man, in bed, turns himself and coughs.

"How are you to-day?" To the last old man.

That old man says nothing; but another old man, a tall old man of very good address, speaking with perfect correctness, comes forward from somewhere, and volunteers an answer. The reply almost always proceeds from a volunteer, and not from the person looked at or spoken to.

"We are very old, sir," in a mild, distinct voice. "We can't expect to be well, most of us."

"Are you comfortable?"

"I have no complaint to make, sir." With a half shake of his head, a half shrug of his shoulders, and a kind of apologetic smile.

"Enough to eat?"

"Why, sir, I have but a poor appetite," with the same air as before; "and yet I get through my allowance very easily."

"But," showing a porringer with a Sunday dinner in it; "here is a portion of mutton, and three potatoes. You can't starve on that?"

"Oh, dear, no, sir," with the same apologetic air. "Not starve."

"What do you want?"

"We have very little bread, sir. It's an exceedingly small quantity of bread."

The nurse, who is now rubbing her hands at the questioner's elbow, interferes with, "It ain't much, raly, sir. You see they've only six ounces a day, and when they've took their breakfast, there can only be a little left for night, sir."

Another old man, hitherto invisible, rises out of his bedclothes, as out of a grave, and looks on.

"You have tea at night?" The questioner is still addressing the well-spoken old man.

"Yes, sir, we have tea at night."

"And you save what bread you can from the morning, to eat with it?"

"Yes, sir—if we can save any."

"And you want more to eat with it?"

"Yes, sir." With a very anxious face.

The questioner, in the kindness of his heart appears a little discomposed, and changes the subject.

"What has become of the old man who used to lie in that bed in the corner?"

The nurse don't remember what old man is referred to. There has been such a many old men. The well-spoken old man is doubtful. The spectral old man who has come to life in bed says, "Billy Stevens." Another old man who has previously had his head in the fire-place, pipes out.

"Charley Walters."

Something like a feeble interest is awakened. I suppose Charley Walters had conversation in him.

"He's dead," says the piping old man.

Another old man with one eye screwed up, hastily displaces the piping old man, and says:

"Yes! Charley Walters died in that bed, and—and—"

"Billy Stevens," persists the spectral old man.

"No, no! and Johnny Rogers died in that bed, and—and—they've both on 'em dead—and Sam'l Bowyer;" this seems very extraordinary to him; "he went out!"

With this he subsides, and all the old men (having had quite enough of it) subside, and the spectral old man goes into his grave again, and takes the shade of Billy Stevens with him.

As we turn to go out at the door, another previously invisible old man, a hoarse old man in a flannel gown, is standing there, as if he had just come up through the floor.

"I beg your pardon, sir, could I take the liberty of saying a word?"

"Yes; what is it?"

"I am greatly better in my health, sir; but what I want, to get me quite round," with his hand on his throat, "is a little fresh air, sir. It has always done my complaint so much good, sir. The regular leave for going out, comes round so seldom, that if the gentlemen, next Friday, would give me leave to go out walking, now and then—for only an hour or so, sir!"

Who could wonder, looking though those weary vistas of bed and infirmity, that it should do him good to meet with some other scenes, and assure himself that there was something else on earth? Who could help wondering why the old men lived on as they did; what grasp they had on life; what crumbs of interest or occupation they could pick up from its bare board; whether Charley Walters had ever described to them the days when he kept company with some old pauper woman in the bud, or Billy Stevens ever told them of the time when he was a dweller in the far-off foreign land called Home!

The morsel of burnt child, lying in another room, so patiently, in bed, wrapped in lint, and looking steadfastly at us with his bright quiet eyes when we spoke to him kindly, looked as if the knowledge of these things, and of all the tender things there are to think about, might have been in his mind—as if he thought, with us, that there was a fellow-feeling in the pauper nurses which appeared to make them more kind to their charges than the race of common nurses in the hospitals—as if he mused upon the future of some older children lying around him in the same place, and thought it best, perhaps, all things considered, that he should die—as if he knew, without fear, of those many coffins, made and unmade, piled up in the store below—and of his unknown friend, "the dropped child," calm, upon the box-lid covered with a cloth. But there was something wistful and appealing, too, in his tiny face, as if, in the midst of all the hard necessities and incongruities he pondered on, he pleaded in behalf of the helpless and the aged poor, for a little more liberty—and a little more bread.

PRINCE BULL. A FAIRY TALE.

Once upon a time, and of course it was in the Golden Age, and I hope you may know when that was, for I am sure I don't, though I have tried hard to find out, there lived in a rich and fertile country, a powerful prince whose name was Bull. He had gone through a great deal of fighting, in his time, about all sorts of things, including nothing; but had gradually settled down to be a steady, peaceable, good-natured, corpulent, rather sleepy prince.

This puissant prince was married to a lovely princess whose name was Fair Freedom. She had brought him a large fortune, and had borne him an immense number of children, and had set them to spinning, and farming, and engineering, and soldiering, and sailoring, and doctoring, and lawyering, and preaching, and all kinds of trades. The coffers of Prince Bull were full of treasure, his cellars were crammed with delicious wines from all parts of the world, the richest gold and silver plate that ever was seen adorned his sideboards, his sons were strong, his daughters were handsome, and, in short, you might have supposed that if there ever lived upon earth a fortunate and happy prince, the name of that prince, take him for all in all, was assuredly Prince Bull.

But appearances, as we all know, are not always to be trusted—far from it; and if they had led you to this conclusion respecting Prince Bull they would have led you wrong, as they often have led me.

For, this good prince had two sharp thorns in his pillow, two hard knobs in his crown, two heavy loads on his mind, two unbridled nightmares in his sleep, two rocks ahead in his course. He could not by any means get servants to suit him, and he had a tyrannical old godmother, whose name was Tape.

She was a fairy, this Tape, and was a bright red all over. She was disgustingly prim and formal, and could never bend herself a hair's breadth this way or that way out of her naturally crooked shape. But she was very potent in her wicked art. She could stop the fastest thing in the world, change the strongest thing into the weakest, and the most useful into the most useless. To do this she had only to put her cold hand upon it, and repeat her own name, Tape. Then it withered away.

At the court of Prince Bull—at least I don't mean literally at his court, because he was a very genteel prince, and readily yielded to his godmother when she always reserved that for his hereditary lords and ladies—in the dominions of Prince Bull, among the great mass of the community who were called in the language of that polite country the mobs and the snobs, were a number of very ingenious men, who were always busy with some invention or other, for promoting the prosperity of the prince's subjects, and augmenting the prince's power. But, whenever they submitted their models for the prince's approval, his godmother stepped forwards, laid her hand upon them, and said "Tape." Hence it came to pass, that when any particularly good discovery was made, the discoverer usually carried it off to some other prince, in foreign parts, who had no old godmother who said Tape. This was not on the whole an advantageous state of things for Prince Bull, to the best of my understanding.

The worst of it was, that Prince Bull had in course of years lapsed into such a state of subjection to this unlucky godmother, had he never made any serious effort to rid himself of her tryanny. I have said this was the worst of it, but there I was wrong, because there is a worse consequence still, behind. The prince's numerous family became so downright sick and tired of Tape, that when they should have helped the prince out of the difficulties into which that evil creature led him, they fell into a dangerous habit of moodily keeping away from him in an impassive and indifferent manner, as though they had quite forgotten that no harm could happen to the prince their father, without its inevitably affecting themselves.

Such was the aspect of affairs at the court of Prince Bull, when this great prince found it necessary to go to war with Prince Bear. He had been for some time very doubtful of his servants, who, besides being indolent and addicted to enriching their families at his expense, domineered over him dreadfully; threatening to discharge themselves if they were found the least fault with, pretending that they had done a wonderful amount of work when they had done nothing, making the most unmeaning speeches that ever were heard in the prince's name, and uniformly showing themselves to be very inefficient indeed. Though, that some of them had excellent characters from previous situations it is not to be denied. Well, Prince Bull called his servants together, and said to them one and all, "Send out my army against Prince Bear. Clothe it, arm it, feed it, provide it with all necessaries and contingencies, and I will pay the piper! Do your duty by my brave troops," said the prince, "and do it well, and I will pour my treasure out like water, to defray the cost. Who ever heard me complain of money well laid out!" Which indeed he had reason for saying, inasmuch as he was well known to be a truly generous and munificent prince.

When the servants heard those words, they sent out the army against Prince Bear, and they set the army tailors to work, and the army provision merchants, and the makers of guns both great and small, and the gunpowder makers, and the makers of ball, shell, and shot; and they bought up all manner of stores and ships, without troubling their heads about the price, and appeared to be so busy that the good prince rubbed his hands, and (using a favorite expression of his), said, "It's all right!" But while they were thus employed, the prince's godmother, who was a great favorite with those servants, looked upon them continually all day long, and whenever she popped in her head at the door said, "How do you do, my children? What are you doing here?" "Official business, godmother." "Oho!" says this wicked fairy. "Tape!" And then the business all went wrong, whatever it was, and the servants' heads became so addled and muddled that they thought they were doing wonders.

Now, this was very bad conduct on the part of the vicious old nuisance, and she ought to have been strangled, even if she had stopped here; but, she didn't stop here, as you shall learn. For, a number of the prince's subjects, being very fond of the prince's army, who were the bravest of men, assembled together and provided all manner of eatables and drinkables, and books to read, and clothes to wear, and tobacco to smoke, and candles to burn, and nailed them up in great packing-cases, and put them aboard a great many ships, to be carried out to that brave army in the cold and inclement country where they were fighting Prince Bear. Then, up comes this wicked fairy as the ships were weighing anchor, and says, "How do you do, my children? What are you doing here?" "We are going with all these comforts to the army, godmother." "Oho!" says she. "A pleasant voyage, my darlings. Tape!" And from that time forth, those enchanted ships went sailing, against wind and tide and rhyme and reason, round and round the world, and whenever they touched at any port were ordered off immediately, and could never deliver their cargoes anywhere.

This, again, was very bad conduct on the part of the vicious old nuisance, and she ought to have been strangled for it if she had done nothing worse; but she did something worse still, as you shall learn. For she got astride of an official broomstick, and muttered as a spell these two sentences, "On Her Majesty's service," and, "I have the honor to be, sir, your most obedient servant," and presently alighted in the cold and inclement country where the army of Prince Bull were encamped to fight the army of Prince Bear. On the seashore of that country, she found piled together a number of houses for the army to live in and a quantity of provisions for the army to live upon, and a quantity of clothes for the army to wear: while, sitting in the mud gazing at them, were a group of officers as red to look at as the wicked old woman herself. So, she said to one of them, "Who are you, my darling, and how do you do?" "I am the Quartermaster General's Department, godmother, and I am pretty well." Then she said to another, "Who are you, my darling, and how do you do?" "I am the Commissariat Department, godmother, and I am pretty well." Then she said to another, "Who are you, my darling, and how do you do?" "I am the head of the Medical Department, godmother, and I am pretty well." Then, she said to some gentlemen scented with lavender, who kept themselves at a great distance from the rest, "And who are you, my pretty pets, and how do you do?" And they answered, "We-aw-are-the-aw-Staff-aw-Department, godmother, and we are very well indeed." "I am delighted to see you all, my beauties," says this wicked old fairy, "Tape!" Upon that, the houses, clothes, and provisions, all moldered away; and the soldiers who were sound, fell sick; and the soldiers who were sick, died miserably; and the noble army of Prince Bull perished.

When the dismal news of his great loss was carried to the prince, he suspected his godmother very much indeed; but he knew that his servants must have kept company with the malicious beldame, and must have given way to her, and therefore he resolved to turn those servants out of their places. So, he called to him a roebuck who had the gift of speech, and said, "Good Roebuck, tell them they must go." So, the good roebuck delivered his message, so like a man that you might have supposed him to be nothing but a man, and they were turned out—but not without warning, for that they had had a long time.

And now comes the most extraordinary part of the history of this prince. When he had turned out those servants, of course he wanted others. What was his astonishment to find that in all his dominions, which contained no less than twenty-seven millions of people, there were not above five-and-twenty servants altogether! They were so lofty about it, too, that instead of discussing whether they should hire themselves as servants to Prince Bull, they turned things topsy-turvy, and considered whether as a favor they should hire Prince Bull to be their master! While they were arguing this point among themselves quite at their leisure, the wicked old red fairy was incessantly going up and down, knocking at the doors of twelve of the oldest of the five-and-twenty, who were the oldest inhabitants in all that country, and whose united ages amounted to one thousand, saying, "Will you hire Prince Bull for your master? Will you hire Prince Bull for your master?" To which one answered, "I will if next door will;" and another, "I won't if over the way does;" and another, "I can't if he, she, or they, might, could, would, or should." And all this time Prince Bull's affairs were going to rack and ruin.

At last, Prince Bull in the height of his perplexity assumed a thoughtful face, as if he were struck by an entirely new idea. The wicked old fairy, seeing this, was at his elbow directly, and said, "How do you do, my prince, and what are you thinking of?" "I am thinking, godmother," says he, "that among all the seven-and-twenty millions of my subjects who have never been in service, there are men of intellect and business who have made me very famous both among my friends and enemies." "Ay, truly?" says the fairy. "Ay, truly," says the prince. "And what then?" says the fairy. "Why, then," says he, "since the regular old class of servants do so ill, are so hard to get, and carry it with so high a hand, perhaps I might try to make good servants of some of these." The words had no sooner passed his lips than she returned, chuckling, "You think so, do you? Indeed, my prince? Tape!" Thereupon he directly forgot what he was thinking of, and cried out lamentably to the old servants, "O, do come and hire your poor old master! Pray do! On any terms!"

And this, for the present, finishes the story of Prince Bull. I wish I could wind it up by saying that he lived happy ever afterwards, but I cannot in my conscience do so; for, with Tape at his elbow, and his estranged children fatally repelled by her from coming near him, I do not, to tell you the plain truth, believe in the possibility of such an end to it.

A PLATED ARTICLE.

Putting up for the night in one of the chiefest towns of Staffordshire, I find it to be by no means a lively town. In fact is as dull and dead a town as any one could desire not to see. It seems as if its whole population might be imprisoned in its railway station. The refreshment-room at that station is a vortex of dissipatoin compared with the extinct town-inn, the Dodo, in the dull High Street.

Why High Street? Why not rather Low Street, Flat Street, Low-Spirited Street, Used-Up Street? Where are the people who belong to the High Street? Can they all be dispersed over the face of the country, seeking the unfortunate strolling manager who decamped from the moldy little theatre last week, in the beginning of his season (as his playbills testify), repentantly resolved to bring him back, and feed him, and be entertained? Or, can they all be gathered to their fathers in the two old chuchyards near to the High Street—retirement into which churchyards appears to be a mere ceremony, there is so very little life outside their confines, and such small discernible difference between being buried alive in the town, and buried dead in the town tombs? Over the way, opposite to the staring blank bow windows of the Dodo, are a little ironmonger's shop, a little tailor's shop (with a picture of the fashions in the small window and a bandy-legged baby on the pavement staring at it)—a watchmaker's shop, where all the clocks and watches must be stopped, I am sure, for they could never have the courage to go, with the town in general, and the Dodo in particular, looking at them. Shade of Miss Linwood, erst of Leicester Square, London, thou wert welcome here, and thy retreat is badly chosen! I myself was one of the last visitors to that awful storehouse of thy life's work, where an anchorite old man and woman took my shilling with a solemn wonder, and conducting me to a gloomy sepulchre of needlework dropping to pieces with dust and age, and shrouded in twilight at high noon, left me there, chilled, frightened, and alone. And now, in ghostly letters on all the dead walls of this dead town, I read thy honored name, and find that thy Last Supper, worked in Berlin wool, invites inspection as a powerful excitement.

Where are the people who are bidden with so much cry to this feast of little wool? Where are they? Who are they? They are not the bandy-legged baby studying the fashions in the tailor's window. They are not the two earthy plowmen lounging outside the saddler's shop, in the stiff square where the town hall stands, like a brick and mortar private on parade. They are not the landlady of the Dodo in the empty bar, whose eye had trouble in it and no welcome, when I asked for dinner. They are not the turnkeys of the town jail, looking out of the gateway in their uniforms, as if they had locked up all the balance (as my American friends would say) of the inhabitants, and could now rest a little. They are not the two dusty millers in the white mill down by the river, where the great waterwheel goes heavily round and round, like the monotonous days and nights in this forgotten place. Then who are they, for there is no one else? No, this deponent maketh oath and saith there is no one else, save and except the waiter at the Dodo, now laying the cloth. I have paced the streets, and stared at the houses, and am come back to the blank bow window of the Dodo; and the town clocks strike seven, and the reluctant echoes seem to cry, "Don't wake us!" and the bandy-legged baby has gone home to bed.

If the Dodo were only a gregarious bird—if it had only some confused idea of making a comfortable nest—I could hope to get through the hours between this and bed-time, without being consumed by devouring melancholy. But, the Dodo's habits are all wrong. It provides me with a trackless desert of sitting-room, with a chair for every day in the year, a table for every month, and a waste of sideboard where a lonely China vase pines in a corner for its mate long departed, and will never make a match with the candlestick in the opposite corner if it live till doomsday. The Dodo has nothing in the larder. Even now, I behold the boots returning with my sole in a piece of paper; and with that portion of my dinner, the boots, perceiving me at the blank bow window, slaps his legs as he comes across the road, pretending it is something else. The Dodo excludes the outer air. When I mount up to my bed-room, a smell of closeness and flue gets lazily up my nose like sleepy snuff. The loose little bits of carpet writhe under my tread, and take wormy shapes. I don't know the ridiculous man in the looking-glass, beyond having met him once or twice in a dish-cover—and I can never shave him to-morrow morning! The Dodo is narrow-minded as to towels; expects me to wash on a freemason's apron without the trimming; when I asked for soap, gives me a stony-hearted something white, with no more lather in it than the Elgin marbles. The Dodo has seen better days, and possesses interminable stables at the back—silent, grass-grown, broken-windowed, horseless.

This mournful bird can fry a sole, however, which is much. Can cook a steak, too, which is more. I wonder where it gets its sherry? If I were to send my pint of wine to some famous chemist to be analyzed, what would it turn out to be made of? It tastes of pepper, sugar, bitter-almonds, vinegar, warm knives, any flat drinks, and a little brandy. Would it unman a Spanish exile by reminding him of his native land at all? I think not. If these really be any townspeople out of the churchyards, and if a caravan of them ever do dine, with a bottle of wine per man, in this desert of the Dodo, it must make good for the doctor next day!

Where was the waiter born? How did he come here? Has he any hope of getting away from here? Does he ever receive a letter, or take a ride upon the railway, or see anything but the Dodo? Perhaps he has seen the Berlin wool. He appears to have a silent sorrow on him, and it may be that. He clears the table; draws the dingy curtains of the great bow window, which so unwillingly consent to meet, that they must be pinned together; leaves me by the fire with my pint decanter, and a little thin, funnel-shaped wineglass, and a plate of pale biscuits—in themselves engendering desperation.

No book, no newspaper! I left the Arabian Nights in the railway carriage, and have nothing to read but Bradshaw, and "that way madness lies." Remembering what prisoners and shipwrecked mariners have done to exercise their minds in solitude, I repeat the multiplication table, the pence table, and the shilling table: which are all the tables I happen to know. What if I write something? The Dodo keeps no pens but steel pens; and those always stick through the paper, and can turn to no other account.

What am I to do? Even if I could have the bandy-legged baby knocked up and brought here, I could offer him nothing but sherry, and that would be the death of him. He would never hold up his head again if he touched it. I can't go to bed, because I have conceived a mortal hatred for my bedroom; and I can't go away, because there is no train for my destination until morning. To burn the biscuits will be but a fleeting joy; still it is a temporary relief, and here they go on the fire! Shall I break the plate? First let me look at the back, and see who made it. Copeland.

Copeland! Stop a moment. Was it yesterday I visited Copeland's works, and saw them making plates? In the confusion of traveling about, it might be yesterday or it might be yesterday month; but I think it was yesterday. I appeal to the plate. The plate says, decidedly, yesterday. I find the plate, as I look at it, growing into a companion.

Don't you remember (says the plate) how you steamed away, yesterday morning, in the bright sun and the east wind, along the valley of the sparkling Trent! Don't you recollect how many kilns you flew past, looking like the bowls of gigantic tobacco pipes, cut short off from the stem and turned upside down? And the fires—and the smoke—and the roads made with bits of crockery, as if all the plates and dishes in the civilized world had been macadamized, expressly for the laming of all the horses? Of course I do!

And don't you remember (says the plate) how you alighted at Stoke—a picturesque heap of houses, kilns, smoke, wharfs, canals, and river, lying (as was most appropriate) in a basin—and how, after climbing up the sides of the basin to look at the prospect, you trundled down again at a walking-match pace, and straight proceeded to my father's, Copeland's, where the whole of my family, high and low, rich and poor, are turned out upon the world from our nursery and seminary, covering some fourteen acres of ground? And don't you remember what we spring from—heaps of lumps of clay, partially prepared and cleaned in Devonshire and Dorsetshire, whence said clay principally comes—and hills of flint, without which we should want our rigging sound, and should never be musical! And as to the flint, don't you recollect that it is first burnt in kilns, and is then laid under the four iron feet of a demon slave, subject to violent stamping fits, who, when they come on, stamps away insanely with his four iron legs, and would crush all the flint in the Isle of Thanet to powder, without leaving off? And as to the clay, don't you recollect how it is put into mills or teazers, and is sliced, and dug, and cut at, by endless knives, clogged and sticky, but persistent—and is pressed out of that machine through a square trough, whose form it takes—and is cut off in square lumps and thrown into a vat, and there mixed with water, and beaten to a pulp by paddle-wheels—and is then run into a rough house, all rugged beams and ladders splashed with white,—superintended by Grindoff the miller in his working clothes, all splashed with white—where it passes through no end of machinery-moved sieves all splashed with white, arranged in an ascending scale of fineness (some so fine, that three hundred silk threads cross each other in a single square inch of their surface), and all in a violent state of ague with their teeth forever chattering, and their bodies forever shivering? And as to the flint again, isn't is mashed and mollified and troubled and soothed, exactly as rags are in a paper-mill, until it is reduced to a pap so fine that it contains no atom of "grit" perceptible to the nicest taste? And as to the flint and the clay together, are they not, after all this, mixed in the proportion of five of clay to one of flint, and isn't the compound—known as "slip"—run into oblong troughs, where its superfluous moisture may evaporate; and finally, isn't it slapped and banged and beaten and patted and kneaded and wedged and knocked about like butter, until it becomes a beautiful gray dough, ready for the potter's use?

In regard of the potter, popularly so called (says the plate), you don't mean to say you have forgotten that a workman called a Thrower is the man under whose hand this dough takes the shapes of the simpler household vessels as quickly as the eye can follow? You don't mean to say you cannot call him up before you, sitting, with his attendant woman, at his potter's wheel—a disc about the size of a dinner plate, revolving on two drums slowly or quickly as he wills—who made you a complete breakfast set for a bachelor, as a good-humored little off-hand joke? You remember how he took up as much dough as he wanted, and, throwing it on his wheel, in a moment fashioned it into a teacup—caught up more clay and made a saucer—a larger dab and whirled it into a teapot—winked at a smaller dab and converted it into the lid of the teapot, accurately fitting by the measurement of his eye alone—coaxed a middle-sized dab for two seconds, broke it, turned it over at the rim, and made a milkpot—laughed, and turned out a slop-basin—coughed, and provided for the sugar? Neither, I think, are you oblivious of the newer mode of making various articles, but especially basins, according to which improvement a mould revolves instead of a disc? For you must remember (says the plate) how you saw the mold of a little basin spinning round and round, and how the workman smoothed and pressed a handful of dough upon it, and how with an instrument called a profile (a piece of wood, representing the profile of a basin's foot) he cleverly scraped and carved the ring which makes the base of any such basin, and then took the basin off the lathe like a doughey skull-cap to be dried, and afterwards (in what is called a green state) to be put into a second lathe, there to be finished and burnished with a steel burnisher? And as to molding in general (says the platter), it can't be necessary for me to remind you that all ornamental articles, and indeed all articles, not quite circular, are made in molds. For you must remember how you saw the vegetable dishes, for example, being made in molds and how the handles of tea-cups, and the spouts of teapots, and the feet of tureens, and so forth, are all made in little separate molds, and are each stuck on to the body corporate, of which it is destined to form a part, with a stuff called "slag," as quickly as you can recollect it. Further, you learned—you know you did—in the same visit, how the beautiful sculptures in the delicate new material called Parian, are all constructed in molds; how, into that material, animal bones are ground up, because the phosphate of lime contained in bones makes it translucent; how everything is molded, before going into the fire, one-fourth larger than it is intended to come out of the fire, because it shrinks in that proportion in the intense heat; how, when a figure shrinks unequally, it is spoiled —emerging from the furnace a mis-shapen birth; a big head and a little body, or a little head and a big body, or a Quasimodo with long arms and short legs, or a Miss Biffin, with neither legs nor arms worth mentioning.

And as to the kilns, in which the firing takes place, and in which some of the more precious articles are burnt repeatedly, in various stages of their process towards completion—as to the kilns (says the plate, warming with the recollection), if you don't remember them with a horrible interest, what did you ever go to Copeland's for? When you stood inside one of those inverted bowls of a pre-Adamite tobacco-pipe, looking up at the blue sky through the open top far off, as you might have looked up from a well, sunk under the center of the pavement of the Pantheon at Rome, had you the least idea where you were? And when you found yourself surrounded, in that dome-shaped cavern, by innumerable columns of an unearthly order of architecture, supporting nothing, and squeezed close together as if a pre-Adamite Samson had taken a vast hall in his arms and crushed it into the smallest possible space, had you the least idea what they were? No (says the plate), of course not! And when you found that each of those pillars was a pile of ingeniously made vessels of coarse clay—called Saggers—looking, when separate, like raised-pies for the table of the mighty Giant Blunderbore, and now all full of various articles of pottery ranged in them in baking order, the bottom of each vessel serving for the cover of the one below, and the whole kiln rapidly filling with these, tier upon tier, until the last workman should have barely room to crawl out, before the closing of the jagged aperture in the wall and the kindling of the gradual fire; did you not stand amazed to think that all the year round these dread chambers are heating, white hot—and cooling—and filling—and emptying—and being bricked up—and broken open—humanly speaking, for ever and ever? To be sure you did! And standing in one of those kilns nearly full, and seeing a free crow shoot across the aperture a-top, and learning how the fire would wax hotter and hotter by slow degrees, and would cool similarly through a space of from forty to sixty hours, did no remembrance of the days when human clay was burnt oppress you? Yes, I think so! I suspect that some fancy of a fiery haze and a shortening breath, and a growing heat, and a gasping prayer; and a figure in black interposing between you and the sky (as figures in black are very apt to do), and looking down, before it grew too hot to look and live, upon the heretic in his edifying agony—I say I suspect (says the plate) that some such fancy was pretty strong upon you when you went out into the air, and blessed God for the bright spring day and the degenerate times!

After that, I needn't remind you what a relief it was to see the simplest process of ornamenting this "biscuit" (as it is called when baked) with brown circles and blue trees—converting it into the common crockery-ware that is exported to Africa, and used in cottages at home. For (says the plate) I am well persuaded that you bear in mind how those particular jugs and mugs were once more set upon a lathe and put in motion; and how a man blew the brown color (having a strong natural affinity with the material in that condition) on them from a blow-pipe as they twirled; and how his daughter, with a common brush, dropped blotches of blue upon them in the right places; and how, tilting the blotches upside down, she made them run into rude images of trees, and there an end.

And didn't you see (says the plate) planted upon my own brother that astounding blue willow, with knobbed and gnarled trunk, and foliage of blue ostrich feathers, which gives our family the title of "willow pattern?" And didn't you observe, transferred upon him at the same time, that blue bridge which spans nothing, growing out from the roots of the willow; and the three blue Chinese going over it into a blue temple, which has a fine crop of blue pushes sprouting out of the roof; and a blue boat sailing above them, the mast of which is burglariously sticking itself into the foundations of a blue villa, suspended sky-high, surmounted by a lump of blue rock, sky-higher, and a couple of billing blue birds, sky-highest —together with the rest of that amusing blue landscape, which has, in deference to our revered ancestors of the Cerulean Empire, and in defiance of every known law of perspective, adorned millions of our family ever since the days of platters? Didn't you perceive an impression of it taken in cobalt color at a cylindrical press, upon a leaf of thin paper, streaming from a plunge-bath of soap and water? Wasn't the paper impression daintily spread, by a light-fingered damsel (you know you admired her)! over the surface of the plate, and the back of the paper rubbed prodigiously hard—with a long tight roll of flannel, tied up like a round of hung beef—without so much as ruffling the paper, wet as it was? Then (says the plate), was not the paper washed away with a sponge, and didn't there appear, set off upon the plate, this identical piece of pre-Raphaelite blue distemper which you now behold? Not to be denied! I had seen all this—and more. I had been shown, at Copeland's, patterns of beautiful design, in faultless perspective, which are causing the ugly old willow to wither out of public favor; and which, being quite as cheap, insinuate good wholesome natural art into the humblest households. When Mr. and Mrs. Sprat have satisfied their material tastes by that equal division of fat and lean which had made their ménage immortal; and have, after the elegant tradition, "licked the platter clean," they can—thanks to modern artists in clay—feast their intellectual tastes upon excellent delineations of natural objects.

This reflection prompts me to transfer my attention from the blue plate to the forlorn but cheerfully painted vase on the sideboard. And surely (says the plate) you have not forgotten how the outlines of such groups of flowers as you see there, are printed, just as I was printed, and are afterwards shaded and filled in with metallic colors by women and girls? As to the aristocracy of our order, made of the finer clay—porcelain peers and peeresses—the slabs, and panels, and table tops, and tazze; the endless nobility and gentry of dessert, breakfast, and tea services; the gemmed perfume bottles, and scarlet and gold salvers; you saw that they were painted by artists, with metallic colors laid on with camel-hair pencils, and afterwards burnt in.

And talking of burning in (says the plate), didn't you find that every subject, from the willow-pattern to the landscape after Turner—having been framed upon clay or porcelain biscuit—has to be glazed? Of course, you saw the glaze—composed of various vitreous materials—laid over every article; and of course you witnessed the close imprisonment of each piece in saggers upon the separate system rigidly enforced by means cf fine-pointed earthenware stilts placed between the articles to prevent the slightest communication or contact. We had in my time—and I suppose it is the same now—fourteen hours' firing to fix the glaze and to make it "run" all over us equally, so as to put a good shiny and unscratchable surface upon us. Doubtless you observed that one sort of glaze—called printing-body—is burnt into the better sort of ware before it is printed. Upon this you saw some of the finest steel engravings transferred, to be fixed by an after glazing—didn't you? Why, of course you did!

Of course I did. I had seen and enjoyed everything that the plate recalled to me, and had beheld with admiration how the rotatory motion which keeps this ball of ours in its place in the great scheme, with all its busy mites upon it, was necessary throughout the process, and could only be dispensed with in the fire. So, listening to the plate's reminders, and musing upon them, I got through the evening after all, and went to bed. I made but one sleep of it—for which I have no doubt I am also indebted to the plate—and left the lonely Dodo in the morning, quite at peace with it, before the bandy-legged baby was up.

OUR HONORABLE FRIEND.

We are delighted to find that he has got in! Our honorable friend is triumphantly returned to serve in the next parliament. He is the honorable member for Verbosity—the best represented place in England.

Our honorable friend has issued an address of congratulation to the electors, which is worthy of that noble constituency, and is a very pretty piece of composition. In electing him, he says, they have covered themselves with glory, and England has been true to herself. (In his preliminary address he had remarked, in a poetical quotation of great rarity, that nought could make us rue, if England to herself did prove but true.)

Our honorable friend delivers a prediction, in the same document, that the feeble minions of a faction will never hold up their heads any more; and that the finger of scorn will point at them in their dejected state, through countless ages of time. Further, that the hireling tools that would destroy the sacred bulwarks of our nationality are unworthy of the name of Englishman; and that so long as the sea shall roll around our ocean-girdled isle, so long his motto shall be, No Surrender. Certain dogged persons of low principles, and no intellect, have disputed whether anybody knows who the minions are, or what the faction is, or which are the hireling tools and which the sacred bulwarks, or what it is that is never to be surrendered, and if not, why not? But, our honorable friend, the member for Verbosity; knows all about it.

Our honorable friend has sat in several parliaments, and given bushels of votes. He is a man of that profundity in the matter of vote-giving, that you never know what he means. When he seems to be voting pure white, he may be in reality voting jet black. When he says, Yes, it is just as likely as not—or rather more so—that he means No. This is the statesmanship of our honorable friend. It is in this that he differs from mere unparliamentary men. You may not know what he meant then, or what he means now; but, our honorable friend knows, and did from the first know, both what he meant then, and what he means now; and when he said he didn't mean it then, he did in fact say, that he means it now.

And if you mean to say that you did not then, and do not now, know what he did mean then, or does mean now, our honorable friend will be glad to receive an explicit declaration from you whether you are prepared to destroy the sacred bulwarks of our nationality.

Our honorable friend, the member for Verbosity, has this great attribute, that he always means something, and always means the same thing. When he came down to that House and mournfully boasted in his place, as an individual member of the assembled Commons of this great and happy country, that he could lay his hand upon his heart, and solemnly declare that no consideration on earth should induce him, at any time, or under any circumstances, to go as far north as Berwick-upon-Tweed; and when he nevertheless, next year, did go to Berwick-upon-Tweed, and even beyond it, to Edinburgh; he had one single meaning, one and indivisible. And God forbid (our honorable friend says) that he should waste another argument upon the man who professes that he cannot understand it! "I do not, gentlemen," said our honorable friend, with indignant emphasis and amid great cheering, on one such public occasion, "I do not, gentlemen, I am free to confess, envy the feelings of that man whose mind is so constituted as that he can hold such language to me, and yet lay his head upon his pillow, claiming to be a native of that land,

> Whose march is o'er the mountain wave,
> Whose house is on the deep!"

(Vehement cheering, and man expelled.)

When our honorable friend issued his preliminary address to the constituent body of Verbosity on the occasion of one particular glorious tiumph, it was supposed by some of his enemies, that even he would be placed in a situation of difficulty by the following comparatively trifling conjunction of circumstances. The dozen noblemen and gentlemen whom our honorable friend supported, had "come in," expressly to do a certain thing. Now, four of the dozen said, at a certain place, that they didn't mean to do that thing, and had never meant to do it; another four of the dozen said, at another certain place, that they did mean to do that thing, and had always meant to do it; two of the remaining four said, at two other certain places, that they meant to do half of that thing (but differed about which half), and to do a variety of nameless wonders instead of the other half; and one of the remaining two declared that the thing itself was dead and buried, while the other as strenuously protested that it was alive and kicking. It was admitted that the parliamentary genius of our honorable friend would be quite able to reconcile such small discrepancies as these; but, there remained the additional difficulty that each of the twelve made entirely different statements at different places, and that all the twelve called everything visible and invisible, sacred and profane, to witness, that they were a perfectly impregnable phalanx of unanimity. This, it was apprehended, would be a stumbling-block to our honorable friend.

The difficulty came before our honorable friend, in this way. He went down to Verbosity to meet his free and independent constituents, and to render an account (as he informed them in the local papers) of the trust they had confided to his hands—that trust which it was one of the proudest privileges of an Englishman to possess—that trust which it was the proudest privilege of an Englishman to hold. It may be mentioned as a proof of the great general interest attaching to the contest, that a lunatic whom nobody employed or knew, went down to Verbosity with several thousand pounds in gold, determined to give the whole away—which he actually did; and that all the publicans opened their houses for nothing. Likewise, several fighting men, and a patriotic group of burglars sportively armed with life-preservers, proceeded (in barouches and very drunk) to the scene of action at their own expense; these children of nature having conceived a warm attachment to our honorable friend, and intending, in their artless manner, to testify it by knocking the voters in the opposite interest on the head.

Our honorable friend being come into the presence of his constituents, and having professed with great suavity that he was delighted to see his good friend Tipkisson there, in his working dress—his good friend Tipkisson being an inveterate saddler, who always opposes him, and for whom he has a mortal hatred—made them a brisk, ginger-beery sort of speech, in which he showed them how the dozen noblemen and gentlemen had (in exactly ten days from their coming in) exercised a surprisingly beneficial effect on the whole financial condition of Europe, had altered the state of the exports and imports for the current half-year, had prevented the drain of gold, had made all that matter right about the glut of the raw material, and had restored all sorts of balances with which the superseded noblemen and gentlemen had played the deuce—and all this, with wheat at so much a quarter, gold at so much an ounce, and the Bank of England discounting good bills at so much per cent.! He might be asked, he observed in a peroration of great power, what were his principles? His principles were what they always had been, his principles were written in the countenances of the lion and unicorn; were stamped indelibly upon the royal shield which those grand animals supported, and upon the free words of fire which that shield bore. His principles were, Britannia and her sea-king trident! His principles were, commercial prosperity coexistently with perfect and profound agricultural contentment; but short of this he would never stop. His principles were, these—with the addition of his colors nailed to the mast, every man's heart in the right place, every man's eye open, every man's hand ready, every man's mind on the alert. His principles were these, concurrently with a general revision of something—speaking generally—and a possible readjustment of something else, not to be mentioned more particularly. His principles, to sum up all in a word, were, Hearths and Altars, Labor and Capital, Crown and Sceptre, Elephant and Castle. And now, if his good friend Tipkisson required any futher explanation from him he (our honorable friend) was there willing, and ready to give it.

Tipkisson, who all this time had stood conspicuous in the crowd, with his arms folded and his eyes intently fastened on our honorable friend—Tipkisson, who throughout our honorable friend's address had not relaxed a muscle of his visage, but had stood there, wholly unaffected by the torrent of eloquence: an object of contempt and scorn to mankind (by which we mean, of course, to the supporters of our honorable friend; Tipkisson now said that he was a plain man (Cries of "You are indeed!") and that what he wanted to know was, what our honorable friend and the dozen noblemen and gentlemen were driving at?

Our honorable friend immediately replied, "At the illimitable perspective."

It was considered by the whole assembly that this happy statement of our honorable friend's political views ought, immediately, to have settled Tipkisson's business and covered him with confusion; but, that implacable person, regardless of the execrations that were heaped upon him from all sides (by which we mean, of course, from our honorable friend's side), persisted in retaining an unmoved countenance, and obstinately retorted that if our honorable friend meant that, he wished to know what that meant?

It was in repelling this most objectionable and indecent opposition, that our honorable friend displayed his highest qualifications for the representation of Verbosity. His warmest supporters present, and those who were best acquainted with his generalship, supposed that the moment was come when he would fall back upon the sacred bulwarks of our nationality. No such thing. He replied thus: "My good friend Tipkisson, gentlemen, wishes to know what I mean when he ask me what we are driving at, and when I candidly tell him, at the illimitable perspective, he wishes (if I understand him) to know what I mean?" "I do!" says Tipkisson, amid cries of "Shame" and "Down with him." "Gentlemen," says our honorable friend, "I will indulge my good friend Tipkisson, by telling him, both what I mean and what I don't mean. (Cheers and cries of "Give it him!") Be it known to him then, and to all whom it may concern, that I do mean altars, hearths, and homes, and that I don't mean mosques and Mohammedanism!" The effect of this home-thrust was terrific. Tipkisson (who is a Baptist) was hooted down and hustled out, and has ever since been regarded as a Turkish renegade who contemplates an early pilgrimage to Mecca. Nor was he the only discomfited man. The charge, while it stuck to him, was magically transferred to our honorable friend's opponent, who was represented in an immense variety of placards as a firm believer in Mahomet; and the men of Verbosity were asked to choose between our honorable friend and the Bible, and our honorable friend's opponent and the Koran. They decided for our honorable friend, and rallied round the illimitable perspective.

It has been claimed for our honorable friend, with much appearance of reason, that he was the first to bend sacred matters to electioneering tactics. However this may be, the fine precedent was undoubtedely set in a Verbosity election, and it is certain that our honorable friend (who was a disciple of Brahma in his youth, and was a Buddhist when we had the honor of traveling with him a few years ago,) always professes in public more anxiety than the whole bench of bishops, regarding the theological and doxological opinions of every man, woman, and child, in the United Kingdom.

As we began by saying that our honorable friend has got in again at this last election, and that we are delighted to find that he has got in, so we will conclude. Our honorable friend cannot come in for Verbosity too often. It is a good sign; it is a great example. It is to men like our honorable friend, and to contests like those from which he comes triumphant, that we are mainly indebted for that ready interest in politics, that fresh enthusiasm in the discharge of the duties of citizenship, that ardent desire to rush to the poll, at present so manifest throughout England. When the contest lies (as it sometimes does) between two such men as our honorable friend, it stimulates the finest emotions of our nature, and awakens the highest admiration of which our heads and hearts are capable.

It is not too much to predict that our honorable friend will be always at his post in the ensuing session. Whatever the question be, or whatever the form of its discussion; address to the crown, election petition, expenditure of the public money, extension of the public suffrage, education, crime; in the whole house, in committee of the whole house, in select committee; in every parliamentary discussion of every subject, everywhere, the honorable member for Verbosity will most certainly be found.

OUR SCHOOL.

We went to look at it, only this last midsummer, and found that the railway had cut it up root and branch. A great trunk-line had swallowed the playground, sliced away the schoolroom, and pared off the corner of the house, which, thus curtailed of its proportions, presented itself, in a green stage of stucco, profilewise towards the road, like a forlorn flat-iron without a handle, standing on end.

It seems as if our schools were doomed to be the sport of change. We have faint recollections of a preparatory day-school, which we have sought in vain, and which must have been pulled down to make a new street, ages ago. We have dim impressions, scarcely amounting to a belief, that it was over a dyer's shop. We know that you went up steps to it; that you frequently grazed your knees in doing so; that you generally got your leg over the scraper, in trying to scrape the mud off a very unsteady little shoe. The mistress of the establishment holds no place in our memory; but, rampant on one eternal door-mat, in an eternal entry long and narrow, is a puffy-dog, with a personal animosity towards us, who triumphs over time. The bark of that baleful pug, a certain radiating way he had of snapping at our undefended legs, the ghastly grinning of his moist black muzzle and white teeth, and the insolence of his crisp tail curled like a pastoral crook, all live and flourish. From an otherwise unaccountable association of him with a fiddle, we conclude that he was of French extraction, and his name Fidèle. He belonged to some female, chiefly inhabiting a back-parlor, whose life appears to us to have been consumed in sniffing, and in wearing a brown beaver bonnet. For her, he would sit up and balance cake upon his nose, and not eat it until twenty had been counted. To the best of our belief we were once called in to witness this performance; when, unable, even in his milder moments, to endure our presence, he instantly made at us, cake and all.

Why a something in mourning, called "Miss Frost," should still connect itself with our preparatory school, we are unable to say. We retain no impression of the beauty of Miss Frost—if she were beautiful; or of the mental fascinations of Miss Frost—if she were accomplished; yet her name and her black dress hold an enduring place in our remembrance. An equally impersonal boy, whose name has long since shaped itself unalterably into "Master Mawls," is not to be dislodged from our brain. Retaining no vindictive feeling towards Mawls—no feeling whatever, indeed—we infer that neither he nor we can have loved Miss Frost. Our first impression of death and burial is associated with this formless pair. We all three nestled awfully in a corner one wintry day, when the wind was blowing shrill, with Miss Frost's pinafore over our heads; and Miss Frost told us in a whisper about somebody being "screwed down." It is the only distinct recollection we preserve of these impalpable creatures, except a suspicion that the manners of Master Mawls were susceptible of much improvement. Generally speaking, we may observe that whenever we see a child intently occupied with its nose, to the exclusion of all other subjects of interest, our mind reverts, in a flash, to Master Mawls.

But, the school that was Our School before the railroad came and overthrew it, was quite another sort of place. We were old enough to be put into Virgil when we went there, and to get prizes for a variety of polishing on which the rust has long accumulated. It was a school of some celebrity in its neighborhood—nobody could have said why—and we had the honor to attain and hold the eminent position of first boy. The master was supposed among us to know nothing, and one of the ushers was supposed to know everything. We are still inclined to think the first-named supposition perfectly correct.

We have a general idea that its subject had been in the leather trade, and had bought us—meaning Our School—of another proprietor who was immensely learned. Whether this belief had any real foundation, we are not likely ever to know now. The only branches of education with which he showed the least acquaintance, were, ruling and corporally punishing. He was always ruling ciphering-books with a bloated mahogany ruler, or smiting the palms of offenders with the same diabolical instrument, or viciously drawing a pair of pantaloons tight with one of his large hands, and caning the wearer with the other. We have no doubt whatever that this occupation was the principal solace of his existence.

A profound respect for money pervaded Our School, which was, of course, derived from its chief. We remember an idiotic goggle-eyed boy, with a big head and half crowns without end, who suddenly appeared as a parlor-boarder, and was rumored to have come by sea from some mysterious part of the earth where his parents rolled in gold. He was usually called "Mr." by the chief, and was said to feed in the parlor on steaks and gravy; likewise to drink currant wine. And he openly stated that if rolls and coffee were ever denied him at breakfast, he would write home to that unknown part of the globe from which he had come, and cause himself to be recalled to the regions of gold. He was put into no form or class, but learnt alone, as little as he liked—and he liked very little—and there was a belief among us that this was because he was too wealthy to be "taken down." His special treatment, and our vague association of him with the sea, and with storms, and sharks, and Coral reefs, occasioned the wildest legends to be circulated as his history. A tragedy in blank verse was written on the subject—if our memory does not deceive us, by the hand that now chronicles these recollections—in which his father figured as pirate, and was shot for a voluminous catalogue of atrocities, first imparting to his wife the secret of the cave in which his wealth was stored, and from which his only son's half-crowns now issued. Dumbledon (the boy's name) was represented as "yet unborn" when his brave father met his fate; and the despair and grief of Mrs. Dumbledon at that calamity was movingly shadowed forth as having weakened the parlor-boarder's mind. This production was received with great favor, and was twice performed with closed doors in the dining-room. But it got wind, and was seized as livelous, and brought the unlucky poet into severe affliction. Some two years afterwards, all of a sudden one day, Dumbledon vanished. It was whispered that the chief himself had taken him down to the docks, and re-shipped him for the Spanish Main; but nothing certain was ever known about his disappearance. At this hour, we cannot thoroughly disconnect him from California.

Our School was rather famous for mysterious pupils.

There was another—a heavy young man, with a large double cased silver watch, and a fat knife, the handle of which was a perfect tool-box,—who unaccountably appeared one day at a special desk of his own, erected close to that of the chief, with whom he held familiar converse. He lived in the parlor, and went out for his walks, and never took the least notice of us—even of us, the first boy—unless to give us a deprecatory kick, or grimly to take our hat off and throw it away, when he encountered us out of doors, which unpleasant ceremony he always performed as he passed—not even condescending to stop for the purpose. Some of us believed that the classical attainments of this phenomenon were terrific, but that his penmanship and arithmetic were defective, and he had come there to mend them; others, that he was going to set up a school, and had paid the chief "twenty-pound down," for leave to see Our School at work. The gloomier spirits even said that he was going to buy us; against which contingency, conspiracies were set on foot for a general defection and running away. However, he never did that. After staying for a quarter, during which period, though closely observed, he was never seen to do anything but make pens out of quills, write small hand in a secret portfolio, and punch the point of the sharpest blade in his knife into his desk all over it, he too disappeared, and his place knew him no more.

There was another boy, a fair, meek boy, with a delicate complexion and rich curling hair, who, we found out, or thought we found out (we have no idea now, and probably had none then, on what grounds, but it was confidentially revealed from mouth to mouth), was the son of a viscount who had deserted his lovely mother. It was understood that if he had his rights, he would be worth twenty thousand a year. And that if his mother ever met his father, she would shoot him with a silver pistol, which she carried, always loaded to the muzzle, for that purpose. He was a very suggestive topic. So was a young mulatto, who was always believed (though very amiable) to have a dagger about him somewhere. But we think they were both outshone, upon the whole, by another boy who claimed to have been born on the twenty-ninth of February, and to have only one birthday in five years. We suspect this to have been a fiction—but he lived upon it all the time he was at Our School.

The principle currency of Our School was slate pencil. It had some inexplicable value, that was never ascertained, never reduced to a standard. To have a great hoard of it, was somehow to be rich. We used to bestow it in charity, and confer it as a precious boon upon our chosen friends. When the holidays were coming, contributions were solicited for certain boys whose relatives were in India, and who were appealed for under the generic name of "Holiday-stoppers,"—apppropriate marks of remembrance that should enliven and cheer them in their homeless state. Personally, we always contributed these tokens of sympathy in the form of slate-pencil, and always felt that it would be a comfort and a treasure to them.

Our School was remarkable for white mice. Red-polls, linnets, and even canaries, were kept in desks, drawers, hat-boxes, and other strange refuges for birds; but white mice were the favorite stock. The boys trained the mice, much better than the masters trained the boys. We recall one white mouse, who lived in the cover of a Latin dictionary, who ran up ladders, drew Roman chariots, shouldered muskets, turned wheels, and even made a very creditable appearance on the stage as the Dog of Montargis. He might have achieved greater things, but for having the misfortune to mistake his way in a triumphal procession to the capitol, when he fell into a deep inkstand, and was dyed black and drowned. The mice were the occasion of some most ingenious engineering, in the construction of their houses and instruments of performance. The famous one belonged to a company of proprietors, some of whom have since made railroads, engines, and telegraphs; the chairman has erected mills and bridges in New Zealand.

The usher at Our School, who was considered to know everything as opposed to the chief, who was considered to know nothing, was a bony, gentle-faced, clerical-looking young man in rusty black. It was whispered that he was sweet upon one of Maxby's sisters (Maxby lived close by, and was a day pupil), and further that he "favored Maxby." As we remember, he taught Italian to Maxby's sisters on half-holidays. He once went to the play with them, and wore a white waistcoat and a rose, which was considered among us equivalent to a declaration. We were of opinion on that occasion, that to the last moment he expected Maxby's father to ask him to dinner at five o'clock, and therefore neglected his own dinner at half-past one, and finally got none. We exaggerated in our imaginations the extent to which he punished Maxby's father's cold meat at supper; and we agreed to believe that he was elevated with wine and water when he came home. But we all liked him; for he had a good knowledge of boys, and would have made it a much better school if he had had more power. He was writing master, mathematical master, English master, made out the bills, mended the pens, and did all sorts of things. He divided the little boys with the Latin master (they were smuggled through their rudimentary books, at odd times when there was nothing else to do), and he always called at parents' houses to inquire after sick boys, because he had gentlemanly manners. He was rather musical, and on some remote quarter-day had bought an old trombone; but a bit of it was lost, and it made the most extraordinary sounds when he sometimes tried to play it of an evening. His holidays never began (on account of the bills) until long after ours; but, in the summer vacations he used to take pedestrian excursions with a knapsack; and at Christmas time, he went to see his father at Chipping Norton, who we all said on no authority) was a dairy-fed-pork-butcher. Poor fellow! He was very low all day on Maxby's sister's wedding-day, and afterwards was thought to favor Maxby more than ever, though he had been expected to spite him. He has been dead these twenty years. Poor fellow!

Our remembrance of Our School, presents the Latin master as a colorless doubled-up near-sighted man with a crutch, who was always cold, and always putting onions into his ears for deafness, and always disclosing ends of flannel under all his garments, and almost always applying a ball of pocket-handkerchief to some part of his face with a screwing action round and round. He was a very good scholar, and took great pains where he saw intelligence and a desire to learn; otherwise, perhaps not. Our memory presents him (unless teased into a passion) with as little energy as color—as having been worried and tormented into monotonous feebleness—as having had the best part of his life ground out of him in a mill of boys. We remember with terror how he fell asleep one sultry afternoon with the little smuggled class before him, and awoke not when the footstep of the chief fell heavy on the floor; how the chief aroused him, in the midst of a dread silence and said, "Mr. Blinkins, are you ill, sir?" how he blushingly replied, "Sir, rather so;" how the chief retorted with severity, "Mr. Blinkins, this is no place to be ill in" (which was very, very true), and walked back solemn as the ghost in Hamlet, until catching a wandering eye he caned that boy for inattention and happily expressed his feelings toward the Latin master through the medium of a substitute.

There was a fat little dancing master who used to come in a gig and taught the more advanced among us hornpipes (as an accomplishment in great social demand in after life); and there was a brisk little French master who used to come in the sunniest weather with a handleless umbrella and to whom the chief was always polite, because (as we believed), if the chief offended him he would instantly address the chief in French and forever confound him before the boys with his inability to understand or reply.

There was besides a serving man whose name was Phil. Our retrospective glance presents Phil as a shipwrecked carpenter cast away upon the desert island of a school and carrying into practice an ingenious inkling of many trades. He mended whatever was broken and made whatever was wanted. He was general glazier among other things, and mended all the broken windows—at the prime cost as was darkly rumored among us of ninepence for every square charged three-and-six to parents. We had a high opinion of his mechanical genius, and generally held that the chief "knew something bad of him" and on pain of divulgence enforced to be his bondsman. We particularly remember that Phil had a sovereign contempt for learning; which engenders in us a respect for his sagacity, as it implies his accurate observation of the relative positions of the chief and the ushers. He was an impenetrable man, who waited at table between whiles and throughout "the half" kept the boxes in severe custody. He was morose even to the chief and never smiled except at breaking-up, when in acknowledgment of the toast "Success to Phil! Hooray!" he would slowly carve a grin out of his wooden face, where it would remain until we were all gone. Nevertheless one time when we had the scarlet fever in the school Phil nursed all the sick boys of his own accord and was like a mother to them.

There was another school not far off and of course Our School could have nothing to say to that school. It is mostly the way with schools whether of boys or men. Well! the railway has swallowed up ours and the locomotives now run smoothly over its ashes.

> " So fades and languishes, grows dim and dies,
> All that this world is proud of,

—and is not proud of too. It had little reason to be proud of Our School, and has done much better since in that way and will do far better yet.

OUR VESTRY.

We have the glorious privilege of being always in hot water if we like. We are a shareholder in a Great Parochial British Joint Stock Bank of Balderdash. We have a vestry in our borough and can vote for a vestryman—might even be a vestryman mayhap if we were inspired by a lofty and noble ambition. Which we are not.

Our vestry is a deliberative assembly of the utmost dignity and importance. Like the Senate of ancient Rome its awful gravity overpowers (or ought to overpower) barbarian visitors. It sits in the capitol (we mean in the capitol building erected for it) chiefly on Saturdays and shakes the earth to its center with the echoes of its thundering eloquence in a Sunday paper.

To get into this vestry in the eminent capacity of vestry men gigantic efforts are made and herculean exertions used. It is made manifest to the dullest capacity at every election that if we reject Snozzle we are done for, and that if we fail to bring in Blunderbooze at the top of the poll we are unworthy of the dearest rights of Britons. Flaming placards are rife on all the dead walls in the borough, public-houses hang out banners, hackney-cabs burst into full-grown flowers of type and everybody is or should be in a paroxysm of anxiety.

At these momentous crises of the national fate we are much assisted in our deliberations by two eminent volunteers; one of whom subscribes himself A Fellow Parishioner, the other A Rate-Payer. Who they are or what they are or where they are nobody knows; but whatever one asserts the other contradicts. They are both voluminous writers, indicting more epistles than Lord Chesterfield in a single week; and the greater part of their feelings are too big for utterance in anything less than capital letters. They require the additional aid of whole rows of notes of admiration, like balloons, to point their generous indignation; and they sometimes communicate a crushing severity to stars. As thus:

MEN OF MOONEYMOUNT.

Is it or is it not a . . . to saddle the parish with a debt of £2,745 6s. 9d. yet claim to be a rigid economist?

Is it, or is it not, a . . . to state as a fact what is proved to be both a moral and a physical impossibility?

Is it or is it not a . . . to call £245 6s. 9d. nothing; and nothing something?

Do you or do you not want a . . . . to represent you in the vestry?

Your consideration of these questions is recommended to you by A FELLOW PARISHIONER.

It was to this important public document that one of our first orators, Mr. Magg (of Little Winkling Street), adverted when he opened the great debate of the fourteenth of November by saying, "Sir, I hold in my hand an anonymous slander"—and when the interruption with which he was at that point assailed by the oposite faction gave rise to that memorable discussion on a point of order which will ever be remembered with interest by constitutional assemblies. In the animated debate to which we refer no fewer than thirty-seven gentlemen, many of them of great eminence including Mr. Wigsby (of Chumbledon Square) were seen upon their legs at one time; and it was on the same great occasion that Dogginson—regarded in our vestry as a "regular John Bull:" we believe in consequence of his having always made up his mind on every subject without knowing anything about it—informed another gentleman of similar principles on the opposite side that if he "cheek'd him" he would resort to the extreme measure of knocking his blessed head off.

This was a great occasion. But our vestry shines habitually. In asserting its own pre-eminence for instance it is very strong. On the least provocation or on none it will be clamorous to know whether it is to be "dictated too" or "trampled on" or "ridden over roughshod." Its great watchword is self-government. That is to say supposing our vestry to favor any little harmless disorder like typhus fever and supposing the government of the country to be by any accident in such ridiculous hands as that any of its authorities should consider it a duty to object to typhus fever—obviously an unconstitutional objection—then our vestry cuts in with a terrible manifest about self-government and claims its independent right to have as much typhus fever as pleases itself. Some absurd and dangerous persons have represented on the other hand that though our vestry may be able to "beat the bounds" of its own parish it may not be able to beat the bounds of its own diseases; which (say they) spread over the whole land in an ever-expanding circle of waste and misery and death and widowhood and orphanage and desolation. But our vestry makes short work of any such fellows as these.

It was our vestry—pink of vestries as it is—that in support of its favorite principle took the celebrated ground of denying the existence of the last pestilence that raged in England when the pestilence was raging at the vestry doors. Dogginson said it was plums; Mr. Wigsby (of Chumbledon Square) said it was oysters; Mr. Magg (of Little Winkling Street) said amid cheering it was the newspapers. The noble indignation of our vestry with that un-English institution the board of health, under those circumstances yields one of the finest passages in its history. It wouldn't hear of rescue. Like Mr. Joseph Miller's Frenchman it would be drowned and nobody should save it. Transported beyond grammer by its kindled ire it spoke in unknown tongues and vented unintelligible bellowings more like an ancient oracle than the modern oracle it is admitted on all hands to be. Rare exigencies produce rare things; and even our vestry new hatched to the woful time, came forth a greater goose than ever.

But this again was a special occasion. Our vestry at more ordinary periods demands its meed of praise.

Our vestry is eminently parliamentary. Playing at parliament is its favorite game. It is even regarded by some of its members as a chapel of ease to the House of Commons: a Little Go to be passed first. It has its strangers' gallery and its reported debates (see the Sunday paper before mentioned) and our vestrymen are in and out of order and on and off their legs and above all are transcendantly quarrelsome after the pattern of the real original.

Our vestry being assembled, Mr. Magg never begs to trouble Mr. Wigsby with a simple inquiry. He knows better than that. Seeing the honorable gentleman associated in their minds with Chumbledon Square in his place, he wishes to ask that honorable gentleman what the intentions of himself and those with whom he acts may be on the subject of the paving of the district known as Piggleum Buildings? Mr. Wigsby replies (with his eye on next Sunday's paper) that in reference to the question which has been put to him by the honorable gentleman opposite, he must take leave to say that if that honorable gentleman had had the courtesy to give him notice of that question he (Mr. Wigsby) would have consulted with his colleagues in reference to the advisability in the present state of the discussions on the new paving-rate of answering that question. But as the honorable gentleman has not had the courtesy to give him notice of that question (great cheering from the Wigsby interest) he must decline to give the honorable gentleman the satisfaction he requires. Mr. Magg instantly rising to retort, is received with loud cries of "Spoke!" from the Wigsby interest and with cheers from the Magg side of the house. Moreover, five gentlemen rise to order, and one of them in revenge for being taken no notice of petrifies the assembly by moving that this vestry do now adjourn; but is persuaded to withdraw that awful proposal in consideration of its tremendous consequences if perservered in. Mr. Magg for the purpose of being heard, then begs to move that you, sir, do now pass to the order of the day; and takes that opportunity of saying that if an honorable gentleman whom he has in his eye, and will not demean himself by more particularly naming (oh, oh, and cheers), supposes that he is to be put down by clamor that honorable gentleman—however supported he may be through thick and thin, by a fellow parishioner, with whom he is well acquainted (cheers and counter-cheers, Mr. Magg being invariably backed by the Rate-Payer)—will find himself mistaken. Upon this, twenty members of our vestry speak in succession concerning what the two great men have meant, until it appears, after an hour and twenty minutes, that neither of them meant anything. Then our vestry begins business.

We have said that, after the pattern of the real original, our vestry in playing at parliament is transcendently quarrelsome. It enjoys a personal altercation above all things. Perhaps the most redoubtable case of this kind we have ever had—though we have had so many that it is difficult to decide—was that on which the last extreme solemnities passed between Mr. Tiddypot (of Gumption House) and Captain Banger (of Wilderness Walk).

In an adjourned debate on the question whether water could be regarded in the light of a necessary of life; respecting which there were great differences of opinion, and many shades of sentiment; Mr. Tiddypot, in a powerful burst of eloquence against that hypothesis, frequently made use of the expression that such and such a rumor had "reached his ears." Captain Banger, following him, and holding that, for purposes of ablution and refreshment, a pint of water per diem was necessary for every adult of the lower classes, and half a pint for every child, cast ridicule upon his address in a sparkling speech, and concluded by saying that instead of those rumors having reached the ears of the honorable gentleman, he rather thought the honorable gentleman's ears must have reached the rumors, in consequence of their well-known length. Mr. Tiddypot immediately rose, looked the honorable and gallant gentleman full in the face, and left the vestry.

The excitement, at this moment painfully intense, was heightened to an acute degree when Captain Banger rose, and also left the vestry. After a few moments of profound silence—one of those breathless pauses never to be forgotten—Mr. Chib (of Tucket's Terrace, and the father of the vestry) rose. He said that words and looks had passed in that assembly, replete with consequences which every feeling mind must deplore. Time pressed. The sword was drawn, and while he spoke the scabbard might be thrown away. He moved that those honorable gentlemen who had left the vestry be recalled, and required to pledge themselves upon their honor that this affair should go no farther. The motion being by a general union of parties unanimously agreed to (for everybody wanted to have the belligerents there, instead of out of sight, which was no fun at all), Mr. Magg was deputed to recover Captain Banger, and Mr. Chib himself to go in search of Mr. Tiddypot. The captain was found in a conspicuous position, surveying the passing omnibuses from the top step of the front-door immediately adjoining the beadle's box; Mr. Tiddypot made a desperate attempt at resistance, but was overpowered by Mr. Chib (a remarkably hale old gentleman of eighty-two), and brought back in safety.

Mr. Tiddypot and the captain being restored to their places, and glaring on each other, were called upon by the chair to abandon all homicidal intentions, and give the vestry an assurance that they did so. Mr. Tiddypot remained profoundly silent. The captain likewise remained profoundly silent, saving that he was observed by those around him to fold his arms like Napoleon Bonaparte, and to snort in his breathing—actions but too expressive of gunpowder.

The most intense emotion now prevailed. Several members clustered in remonstrance round the captain and several round Mr. Tiddypot; but, both were obdurate. Mr. Chib then presented himself amid tremendous cheering, and said, that not to shrink from the disgrace of his painful duty, he must now move that both honorable gentlemen be taken into custody by the beadle, and conveyed to the nearest police-office, there to be held to bail. The union of parties still continuing, the motion was seconded by Mr. Wigsby—on all usual occasions Mr. Chib's opponent—and rapturously carried with only one dissenting voice. This was Dogginson's, who said from his place "Let 'em fight it out with fists;" but whose coarse remark was received as it merited.

The beadle now advanced along the floor of the vestry, and beckoned with his cocked hat to both members. Every breath was suspended. To say that a pin might have been heard to fall, would be feebly to express the all-absorbing interest and silence. Suddenly, enthusiastic cheering broke out from every side of the vestry. Captain Banger had risen—being, in fact, pulled up by a friend on either side, and poked up by a friend behind.

The captain said, in a deep determined voice, that he had every respect for that vestry and every respect for that chair; that he also respected the honorable gentleman of Gumption House; but, that he respected honor more. Hereupon the captain sat down, leaving the whole vestry much affected. Mr. Tiddypot instantly rose, and was received with the same encouragement. He likewise said—and the exquisite art of this orator communicated to the observation an air of freshness and novelty—that he too had every respect for that vestry; that he too had every respect for that chair. That he too respected the honorable and gallant gentleman of Wilderness Walk; but, that he too respected his honor more. "Hows'ever," added the distinguished vestryman, "if the honorable or gallant gentleman's honor is never more doubted and damaged than it is by me, he's all right." Captain Banger immediately started up again, and said that after those observations, involving as they did ample concession to his honor without compromising the honor of the honorable gentleman, he would be wanting in honor as well as in generosity, if he did not at once repudiate all intention of wounding the honor of the honorable gentleman, or saying anything dishonorable to his honorable feelings. These observations were interrupted by bursts of cheers. Mr. Tiddypot retorted that he well knew the spirit of honor by which the honorable and gallant gentleman was so honorably animated and that he accepted an honorable explanation, offered in a way that did him honor, but he trusted that the vestry would consider that his (Mr. Tiddypot's) honor had imperatively demanded of him that painful course which he had felt it due to his honor to adopt. The captain and Mr. Tiddypot then touched their hats to one another across the vestry, a great many times, and it is thought that these proceedings (reported to the extent of several columns in next

Sunday's paper) will bring them in as churchwardens next year.

All this was strictly after the pattern of the real original, and so are the whole of our vestry's proceedings. In all their debates they are laudably imitative of the windy and wordy slang of the real original, and nothing that is better in it. They have headstrong party animosities, without any reference to the merits of questions; they tack a surprising amount of debate to a very little business; they set more store by forms then they do by substances—all very like the real original! It has been doubted in our borough, whether our vestry is of any utility; but our own conclusion is, that it is of the use to the borough that a diminishing mirror is to a painter, as enabling it to perceive in a small focus of absurdity all the surface defects of the real original.

OUR BORE.

It is unnecessary to say that we keep a bore. Everybody does. But, the bore whom we have the pleasure and honor of enumerating among our particular friends, is such a generic bore, and has so many traits (as it appears to us) in common with the great bore family, that we are tempted to make him the subject of the present notes. May he be generally accepted!

Our bore is admitted on all hands to be a good-hearted man. He may put fifty people out of temper, but he keeps his own. He preserves a sickly solid smile upon his face, when other faces are ruffled by the perfection he has attained in his art, and has an equable voice which never travels out of one key or rises above one pitch. His manner is a manner of tranquil interest. None of his opinions are startling. Among his deepest-rooted convictions, it may be mentioned that he considers the air of England damp, and holds that our lively neighbors —he always calls the French our lively neighbors—have the advantage of us in that particular. Nevertheless he is unable to forget that John Bull is John Bull all the world over, and that England with all her faults is England still.

Our bore has traveled. He could not possibly be a complete bore without having traveled. He rarely speaks of his travels without introducing, sometimes on his own plan of construction, morsels of the language of the country—which he always translates. You cannot name to him any little remote town in France, Italy, Germany, or Switzerland, but he knows it well; stayed there a fortnight under peculiar circumstances. And talking of that little place, perhaps you know a statue over an old fountain, up a little court, which is the second—no, the third—stay—yes, the third turning on the right, after you come out of the Post house, going up the hill towards the market? You don't know that statue? Nor that fountain? You surprise him. They are not usually seen by travelers (most extraordinary, he has never yet met with a single traveler who knew them, except one German, the most intelligent man he ever met in his life!) but he thought that you would have been the man to find them out. And then he describes them in a circumstantial lecture half an hour long, generally delivered behind a door which is constantly being opened from the other side; and implores you, if you ever revisit that place, now do go and look at that statue and fountain!

Our bore, in a similar manner, being in Italy, made a discovery of a dreadful picture, which has been the terror of a large portion of the civilized world ever since. We have seen the liveliest men paralyzed by it, across a broad dining table. He was lounging among the mountains, sir, basking in the mellow influences of the climate, when he came to *una piccola chiesa*—a little church—or perhaps it would be more correct to say *una piccolissima cappela*—the smallest chapel you can possibly imagine—and walked in. There was nobody inside but a *cieco*—a blind man—saying his prayers, and a *vecchio padre*—old friar—rattling a money box. But, above the head of that friar, and immediately to the right of the altar as you enter—to the right of the altar? No To the left of the altar as you enter—or say near the center—there hung a painting (subject, Virgin and Child) so divine in its expression, so pure and yet so warm and rich in its tone, so fresh in its touch, at once so glowing in its color and so statuesque in its repose, that our bore cried out in an ecstasy, "That's the finest picture in Italy!" And so it is, sir. There is no doubt of it. It is astonishing that that picture is so little known. Even the painter is uncertain. He afterwards took Blumb, of the Royal Academy (it is to be observed that our bore takes none but eminent people to see sights, and that none but eminent people take our bore), and you never saw a man so affected in your life as Blumb was. He cried like a child! And then our bore begins his description in detail—for all this is introductory—and strangles his hearers with the folds of the purple drapery.

By an equally fortunate conjunction of accidental circumstances, it happened that when our bore was in Switzerland, he discovered a valley, of that superb character, that Chamouni is not to be mentioned in the same breath with it. This is how it was, sir. He was traveling on a mule—had been in the saddle some days—when, as he and the guide, Pierre Blanquo, whom you may know, perhaps—our bore is sorry you don't, because he's the only guide deserving of the name—as he and Pierre were descending, towards evening, among those everlasting snows, to the little village of La Croix, our bore observed a mountain track turning off sharply to the right. At first he was uncertain whether it was a track at all, and in fact, he said to Pierre, "*Qu'est que c'est donc mon ami?*—What is that, my friend?" "*Où, monsieur?*" said Pierre—"Where, sir?" "*La!*—there!" said our bore. "*Monsieur, ce n'est rien de tout*—sir, its nothing at all," said Pierre. "*Allons!*—Make haste. *Il va neiger*—it's going to snow!" But our bore was not to be done in that way, and he firmly replied, "I wish to go in that direction—*je veux y aller.* I am bent upon it—*je suis déterminé. En avant!*—go ahead!" In consequence of which firmness on our bore's part, they proceeded, sir, during two hours of evening, and three of moonlight (they waited in a cavern till the moon was up), along the slenderest track, overhanging perpendicularly the most awful gulfs, until they arrived, by a winding descent, in a valley that possibly, and he may say probably, was never visited by any stranger before. What a valley! Mountains piled on mountains, avalanches stemmed by pine forests; waterfalls, chalets, mountain-torrents, wooden bridges, every conceivable picture of Swiss scenery! The whole village turned out to receive our bore. The peasant girls kissed him, the men shook hands with him, one old lady of benevolent appearance wept upon his breast. He was conducted, in a primitive triumph, to the little inn, where he was taken ill next morning, and lay for six weeks, attended by the amiable hostess (the same benevolent old lady who had wept over night) and her charming daughter, Fanchette. It is nothing to say that they were attentive to him; they doted on him. They called him in their simple way, *l'Ange Anglais*—the English Angel. When our bore left the valley, there was not a dry eye in the place; some of the people attended him for miles. He begs and entreats of you as a personal favor, that if you ever go to Switzerland again (you have mentioned that your last visit was your twenty-third), you will go to that valley, and see Swiss scenery for the first time. And if you want really to know the pastoral people of Switzerland, and to understand them, mention, in that valley, our bore's name!

Our bore has a crushing brother in the East, who, somehow or other, was admitted to smoke pipes with Mehemet Ali, and instantly become an authority on the whole range of Eastern matters, from Haroun Alraschid to the present Sultan. He is in the habit of expressing mysterious opinions on this wide range of subjects, but on questions of foreign policy more particularly, to our bore, in letters; and our bore is continually sending bits of these letters to the newspapers (which they never insert), and carrying other bits about in his pocket-book. It is even whispered that he has been seen at the foreign office, receiving great consideration from the messengers, and having his card promptly borne into the sanctuary of the temple. The havoc committed in society by this Eastern brother is beyond belief. Our bore is always ready with him. We have known our bore to fall upon an intelligent young sojourner in the wilderness, in the first sentence of a narrative, and beat all confidence out of him with one blow of his brother. He became omniscient, as to foreign policy, in the smoking of those pipes with Mehemet Ali. The balance of power in Europe, the machinations of the Jesuits, the gentle and humanizing influence of Austria, the position and prospects of that hero of the noble soul who is worshiped by happy

France, are all easy reading to our bore's brother. And our bore is so provokingly self denying about him! "I don't pretend to more than a very general knowledge of these subjects myself," says he, after enervating the intellects of several strong men, "but these are my brother's opinions, and I believe he is known to be well-informed."

The commonest incidents and places would appear to have been made special, expressly for our bore. Ask him whether he ever chanced to walk, between seven and eight in the morning, down St. James's Street, London, and he will tell you, never in his life but once. But, it's curious that that once was in eighteen thirty; and that as our bore was walking down the street you have just mentioned, at the hour you have just mentioned—half-past seven—or twenty minutes to eight. No! Let him be correct!—exactly a quarter before eight by the palace clock—he met a fresh-colored, gray-haired, good-humored looking gentleman, with brown umbrella, who, as he passed him, touched his hat and said, "Fine morning, sir, fine morning!"—William the Fourth!

Ask our bore whether he has seen Mr. Barry's new Houses of Parliament, and he will reply that he has not inspected them minutely, but that you remind him that it was his singular fortune to be the last man to see the old Houses of Parliament before the fire broke out. It happened in this way. Poor John Spine, the celebrated novelist, had taken him over to South Lambeth to read to him the last few chapters of what was certainly his best book—as our bore told him at the time, adding, "Now, my dear John, touch it, and you'll spoil it!" and our bore was going back to the club by way of Millbank and Parliament Street, when he stopped to think of Canning, and look at the Houses of Parliament. Now, you know far more of the philosophy of mind than our bore does, and are much better able to explain to him than he is to explain to you why or wherefore, at that particular time, the thought of fire should come into his head. But it did. It did. He thought, What a national calamity if an edifice connected with so many associations should be consumed by fire! At that time there was not a single soul in the street but himself. All was quiet, dark, and solitary. After contemplating the building for a minute—or, say a minute and a half, not more—our bore proceeded on his way, mechanically repeating, What a national calamity if such an edifice, connected with such associations, should be destroyed by—— A man coming towards him in a violent state of agitation completed the sentence with the exclamation, Fire! Our bore looked round, and the whole structure was in a blaze.

In harmony and union with these experiences, our bore never went anywhere in a steamboat but he made either the best or the worst voyage ever known on that station. Either he overheard the captain say to himself, with his hands clasped, "We are all lost!" or the captain openly declared to him that he had never made such a run before, and never should be able to do it again. Our bore was in that express train on that railway, when they made (unknown to the passengers) the experiment of going at the rate of a hundred miles an hour. Our bore remarked on that occasion to the other people in the carriage, "This is too fast, but sit still!" He was at the Norwich musical festival when the extraordinary echo for which science has been wholly unable to account, was heard for the first and last time. He and the bishop heard it at the same moment, and caught each other's eye. He was present at that illumination of St. Peter's, of which the Pope is known to have remarked, as he looked at it out of his window in the Vatican, "*O Cielo! Questa cosa non sara fatta, mai ancora, come questa*—O Heaven! this thing will never be done again, like this!" He has seen every lion he ever saw, under some remarkably propitious circumstances. He knows there is no fancy in it, because in every case the showman mentioned the fact at the time, and congratulated him upon it.

At one period of his life, our bore had an illness. It was an illness of a dangerous character for society at large. Innocently remark that you are very well, or that somebody else is very well; and our bore, with a preface that one never knows what a blessing health is until one has lost it, is reminded of that illness, and drags you through the whole of its symptoms, progress, and treatment. Innocently remark that you are not well, or that somebody else is not well, and the same inevitable result ensues. You will learn how our bore felt a tightness about here, sir, for which he couldn't account, accompanied with a constant sensation as if he were being stabbed—or, rather, jobbed—that expresses it more correctly—jobbed with a blunt knife. Well, sir! This went on, until sparks began to flit before his eyes, water-wheels to turn round in his head, and hammers to beat incessantly thump, thump, thump, all down his back along the whole of the spinal vertebræ. Our bore, when his sensations had come to this, thought it a duty he owed to himself to take advice, and he said, Now, whom shall I consult? He naturally thought of Callow, at that time one of the most eminent physcians in London, and he went to Callow. Callow said, "Liver!" and prescribed rhubarb and calomel, low diet, and moderate exercise. Our bore went on with this treatment, getting worse every day, until he lost confidence in Callow, and went to Moon, whom half the town was then mad about. Moon was interested in the case; to do him justice he was very much interested in the case; and he said "Kidneys!" He altered the whole treatment, sir, gave strong acids, cupped, and blistered. This went on, our bore still getting worse every day, until he openly told Moon it would be a satisfaction to him if he would have a consultation with Clatter. The moment Clatter saw our bore, he said, "Accumulation of fat about the heart!" Snugglewood, who was called in with him, differed, and said, "Brain!" But, what they all agreed upon was, to lay our bore upon his back, to shave his head, to leech him, to administer enormous quantities of medicine, and to keep him low; so that he was reduced to a mere shadow, you wouldn't have known him, and nobody considered it possible that he could ever recover. This was his condition, sir, when he heard of Jilkins, at that period in a very small practice, and living in the upper part of a house in Great Portland Street; but still, you understand, with a rising reputation among the few people to whom he was known. Being in that condition in which a drowning man catches at a straw, our bore sent for Jilkins. Jilkins came. Our bore liked his eye, and said, "Mr. Jilkins, I have a presentiment that you will do me good." Jilkins's reply was characteristic of the man. It was, "Sir, I mean to do you good." This confirmed our bore's opinion of his eye, and they went into the case together; went completely into it. Jilkins then got up, walked across the room, came back, and sat down. His words were these. "You have been humbugged. This is a case of indigestion, occasioned by deficiency of power in the stomach. Take a mutton chop in half-an-hour, with a glass of the finest old sherry that can be got for money. Take two mutton chops to-morrow and two glasses of the finest old sherry. Next day, I'll come again." In a week our bore was on his legs, and Jilkins's success dates from that period!

Our bore is great in secret information. He happens to know many things that nobody else knows. He can generally tell you where the split is in the ministry; he knows a deal about the queen; and has little anecdotes to relate of the royal nursery. He gives you the judges' private opinion of Sludge, the murderer, and his thoughts when he tried him. He happens to know what such a man got by such a transaction, and it was £15,500, and his income is £12,000 a year. Our bore is also great in mystery. He believes, with an exasperating appearance of profound meaning, that you saw Parkins last Sunday? Yes, you did. Did he say anything particular? No, nothing particular. Our bore is surprised at that. Why? Nothing. Only he understood that Parkins had come to tell you something. What about? Well! our bore is not at liberty to mention what about. But he believes you will hear that from Parkins himself, soon, and he hopes it may not surprise you as it did him. Perhaps, however, you never heard about Parkins's wife's sister? No. Ah! says our bore, that explains it!

Our bore is also great in argument. He infinitely enjoys a long humdrum, drowsy interchange of words of dispute about nothing. He considers that it strengthens the mind, consequently, he "don't see that," very often. Or, he would be glad to know what you mean by that. Or, he doubts that. Or, he has always understood exactly the reverse of that. Or, he can't admit that. Or, he begs too deny that. Or, surely you don't mean that. And so on. He once advised us; offered us a piece of advice, after the fact, totally impracticable and wholly impossible of acceptance, because it supposed the fact, then eternally disposed of, to be yet in abeyance. It was a dozen years ago, and to this hour our bore benevolently wishes, in a mild voice, on certain regular occasions, that we had thought better of his opinion.

The instinct with which our bore finds out another, and closes with him, is amazing. We have seen him pick his man out of fifty men, in a couple of minutes. They love to go (which they do naturally) into a slow argument on a previously exhausted subject, and to contradict each other, and to wear the hearers out, without impairing their own perennial freshness as bores. It improves the good understanding between them, and they get together afterwards, and bore each other amicably. Whenever we see our bore behind a door with another bore, we know that when he comes forth, he will praise the other bore as one of the most intelligent men he ever met. And this bringing us to the close of what we had to say about our bore, we are anxious to have it understood that he never bestowed this praise on us.

A MONUMENT OF FRENCH FOLLY.

It was profoundly obserevd by a witty member of the Court of Common Council, in council assembled in the City of London, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty, that the French are a frogeating people, who wear wooden shoes.

We are credibly informed, in reference to the nation whom this choice spirit so happily disposed of, that the caricatures and stage representations which were current in England some half century ago, exactly depict their present condition. For example, we understand that every Frenchman, without exception, wears a pigtail and curl-papers. That he is extremely sallow, thin, long-faced, and lantern-jawed. That the calves of his legs are invariably undeveloped; that his legs fail at the knees, and that his shoulders are always higher than his ears. We are likewise assured that he rarely tastes any food but soup maigree, and an onion; that he always says "By Gar! Aha! Vat you tell me, sare?'" at the end of every sentence he utters, and that the true generic name of his race is the Mounseers, or the Parly-voos. If he be not a dancing-master, or a barber, he must be a cook; since no other trades but those three are congenial to the tastes of the people, or permitted by the institutions of the country. He is a slave, of course. The ladies of France (who are also slaves) invariably have their heads tied up in Belcher handkerchiefs, wear long-ear-rings, carry tambourines and beguile the weariness of their yoke by singing in head voices, through their noses—principally to barrel-organs.

It may be generally summed up, of this inferior people, that they have no idea of anything.

Of a great institution like Smithfield, they are unable to form the least conception. A beast market in the heart of Paris would be regarded an impossilbe nuisance. Nor have they any notion of slaughter-houses in the midst of a city. One of these benighted frog-eaters would scarcely understand your meaning, if you told him of the existence of such a British bulwark.

It is agreeable, and perhaps pardonable, to indulge in a little self-complacency when our right to it is thoroughly established. At the present time, to be rendered memorable by a final attack on that good old market which is the (rotten) apple of the corporation's eye, let us compare ourselves, to our national delight and pride as to these two subjects of slaughter-house and beast market, with the outlandish foreigner.

The blessings of Smithfield are too well understood to need recapitulation; all who run (away from mad bulls and pursuing oxen) may read. Any market-day they may be beheld in glorious action. Possibly the merits of our slaughter-houses are not yet quite so generally appreciated.

Slaughter-houses, in the large towns of England, are always (with the exception of one or two enterprising towns) most numerous in the most densely crowded places, where there is the least circulation of air. They are often underground, in cellars; they are sometimes in close back yards; sometimes (as in Spitalfields) in the very shops where the meat is sold. Occasionally, under good private management, they are ventilated and clean. For the most part, they are unventilated and dirty; and, to the reeking walls, putrid fat and other offensive animal matter clings with a tenacious hold. The busiest slaughter-houses in London are in the neighborhood of Smithfield, in Newgate Market, in Whitechapel, in Newport Market, in Leadenhall Market, in Clare Market. All these places are surrounded by houses of a poor description, swarming with inhabitants. Some of them are close to the worst burial-grounds in London. When the slaughter-house is below the ground, it is a common practice to throw the sheep down areas, neck and crop—which is exciting, but not at all cruel. When it is on the level surface, it is often extremely difficult of approach. Then, the beasts have to be worried, and goaded, and pronged, and tail-twisted, for a long time before they can be got in—which is entirely owing to their natural obstinacy. When it is not difficult of approach, but is in a foul condition, what they see and scent makes them still more reluctant to enter—which is their natural obstinacy again. When they do get in at last, after no trouble and suffering to speak of (for, there is nothing in the previous journey into the heart of London, the night's endurance in Smithfield, the struggle out again, among the crowded multitude, the coaches, carts, wagons, omnibuses, gigs, chaises, phaetons, cabs, trucks, dogs, boys, whoopings, roarings and ten thousand other distractions), they are represented to be in a most unfit state to be killed, according to microscopic examinations made of their fevered blood by one of the most distinguished physiologists in the world, Professor Owen--but that's humbug. When they are killed, at last, their reeking carcases are hung in impure air, to become, as the same Professor will explain to you, less nutritious and more unwholesome—but he is only an uncommon counseler, so don't mind him. In half a quarter of a mile's length of Whitechapel, at one time, there shall be six hundred newly slaughtered oxen hanging up, and seven hundred sheep—but, the more the merrier—proof of prosperity. Hard by Snow Hill and Warwick Lane, you shall see the little children, inured to sights of brutality from their birth, trotting along the alleys, mingled with troops of horribly busy pigs, up to their ankles in blood—but it makes the young rascals hardy. Into the imperfect sewers of this overgrown city, you shall have the immense mass of corruption, engendered by these practices, lazily thrown out of sight, to rise, in poisonous gases, into your house at night, when your sleeping children will most readily absorb them, and to find its languid way, at last into the river that you drink—but, the French are a frog-eating people who wear wooden shoes, and it's Oh, the roast beef of England, my boy, the jolly old English roast beef.

It is quite a mistake—a new-fangled notion altogether—to suppose that there is any natural antagonism between putrefaction and health. They know better than that, in the Common Council. You may talk about Nature, in her wisdom, always warning man through his sense of smell, when he draws near to something dangerous; but, that won't go down in the city. Nature very often don't mean anything. Mrs. Quickly says that prunes are ill for a green wound; but whosoever says that putrid animal substances are ill for a green wound, or for robust vigor, or for anything or for any body, is a humanity-monger and a humbug. Britons never, never, never, etc., therefore. And prosperity to cattle-driving, cattle-slaughtering, bone-crushing, blood-boiling, trotter scraping, tripe-dressing, paunch-cleaning, gut-spinning, hide-preparing, tallow-melting, and other salubrious proceedings, in the midst of hospitals, churchyards, workhouses, schools, infirmaries, refuges, dwellings, provision shops, nurseries, sick-beds, every stage and baiting-place in the journey from birth to death!

These uncommon counselors, your Professor Owens and fellows, will contend that to tolerate these things in a civilized city, is to reduce it to a worse condition than Bruce found to prevail in Abyssinia. For there (say they) the jackals and wild dogs came at night to devour the offal; whereas, here there are no such natural scavengers, and quite as savage customs. Further, they will demonstrate that nothing in Nature is intended to be wasted, and that besides the waste which such abuseso ccasion in the articles of health and life—main sources of the riches of any community—they lead to a prodigious waste of changing matters, which might, with proper preparation, and under scientific direction, be safely applied to the increase of the fertility of the land. Thus (they argue) does Nature ever avenge infractions of her beneficent laws, and so surely as man is determined to warp any of her blessings into curses, shall they become curses, and shall he suffer heavily. But, this is cant. Just as it is cant of the worst description to say to the London corporation, "How can you exhibit to the people so plain a spectacle of dishonest equivocation, as to claim the right of holding a market in the midst of the great city, for one of your vested privileges, when you know that when your last market holding charter was granted to you by King Charles the First, Smithfield stood in the suburbs of London, and is in that very charter so described in those five words?"—which is certainly true, but has nothing to do with the question.

Now to the comparison, in these particulars of civilization, between the capital of England, and the capital of that frog-eating and wooden-shoe wearing country, which the illustrious Common Councilman so sarcastically settled.

In Paris there is no cattle market. Cows and calves are sold within the city, but, the cattle markets are at Poissy, about thirteen miles off, on a line of railway; and Sceaux, about five miles off. The Poissy market is held every Thursday; the Sceaux market, every Monday. In Paris, there are no slaughter-houses, in our acceptation of the term. There are five public abattoirs—within the walls, though in the suburb—and in these all the slaughtering for the city must be performed. They are managed by a syndicate or guild of butchers, who confer with the minister of the interior on all matters affecting the trade, and who are consulted when any new regulations are contemplated for its government. They are, likewise, under the vigilant superintendence of the police. Every butcher must be licensed; which proves him at once to be a slave, for we don't license butchers in England—we only license apothecaries, attorneys, post-masters, publicans, hawkers, retailers of tobacco, snuff, pepper, and vinegar—and one or two other little trades, not worth mentioning. Every arrangement in connection with the slaughtering and sale of meat, is matter of strict police regulation. (Slavery again, though we certainly have a general sort of police act here.)

But, in order that the reader may understand what a monument of folly these frog-eaters have raised in their abattoirs and cattle-markets, and may compare it with what common counseling has done for us all these years, and would still do but for the innovating spirit of the times, here follows a short account of a recent visit to these places:

It was as sharp a February morning as you would desire to feel at your fingers' ends when I turned out—tumbling over a chiffonier with his little basket and rake, who was picking up the bits of colored paper that had been swept out, over night, from a bon-bon shop—to take the butcher's train to Poissy. A cold, dim light just touched the high roofs of the Tuileries which have seen such changes, such distracted crowds, such riot and bloodshed; and they looked as calm, and as old, all covered with white frost, as the very Pyramids. There was not light enough, yet, to strike upon the towers of Notre Dame across the water, but I thought of the dark pavement of the old cathedral as just beginning to be streaked with gray; and of the lamps in the "House of God," the hospital close to it, burning low and being quenched; and of the keeper of the morgue going about with a fading lantern, busy in the arrangement of his terrible waxwork for another sunny day.

The sun was up, and shining merrily when the butchers and I announcing our departure with an engine shriek to sleepy Paris, rattled away for the cattle market. Across the country, over the Seine, among a forest of scrubby trees—the hoar frost lying cold in shady places, and glittering in the light—and here we are at Poissy! Out leap the butchers, who have been chattering all the way like madmen, and off they struggle for the cattle market (still chattering, of course, incessantly), in hats and caps of all shapes, in coats and blouses, in calf-skins,cow-skins, horse-skins, furs, shaggy mantles, hairy coats, sacking, baize, oil-skin, anything you please that will keep a man and a butcher warm upon a frosty morning.

Many a French town have I seen, between this spot of ground and Strasburg or Marseilles, that might sit for your picture, little Poissy! Barring the details of your old church, I know you well, albeit we make acquaintance, now, for the first time. I know your narrow, straggling, winding streets, with a kennel in the midst, and lamps slung across. I know your picturesque street-corners, winding up hill Heaven knows why or where! I know your tradesman's inscriptions, in letters not quite fat enough; your barber's brazen basins dangling over little shops; your cafés and estaminets, with cloudy bottles of stale syrup in the windows, and pictures of crossed billiard cues outside. I know this identical gray horse with his tail rolled up in a knot like the "back hair" of an untidy woman, who won't be shod, and who makes himself heraldic by clattering across the street on his hind legs, while twenty voices shriek and growl at him as a brigand, an accursed robber, and an everlasting-doomed pig. I know your sparkling town-fountain, too, my Poissy, and am glad to see it near a cattle-market, gushing so freshly, under the auspices of a gallant little sublimated Frenchman wrought in metal, perched upon the top. Through all the land of France I know this unswept room at The Glory, with its peculiar smell of beans and coffee, where the butchers crowd about the stove, drinking the thinnest of wine from the smallest tumblers; where the thickest of coffee-cups mingle with the longest of loaves, and weakest of lump sugar; where Madame at the counter easily acknowledges the homage of all entering and departing butchers; where the billiard-table is covered up in the midst like a great bird-cage—but the bird may sing by and by!

A bell! The calf market! Polite departure of butchers. Hasty payment and departure on the part of amateur visitor. Madame reproaches ma'amselle for too fine a susceptibility in reference to the devotion of a butcher in a bear-skin. Monsieur the landlord of The Glory, counts a double handful of sous, without an unobliterated inscription, or an undamaged crowned head, among them.

There is a little noise without, abundant space, and no confusion. The open area devoted to the market is divided into three portions: the calf market, the cattle market, the sheep market. Calves at eight, cattle at ten, sheep at midday. All is very clean.

The calf market is a raised platform of stone, some three or four feet high, open on all sides, with a lofty overspreading roof, supported on stone columns, which give it the appearance of a sort of vineyard form Northern Italy. Here, on the raised pavement, lie innumerable calves, all bound hind-legs and fore-legs together, and all trembling violently—perhaps with cold, perhaps with fear, perhaps with pain; for, this mode of tying, which seems to be an absolute superstition with the peasantry, can hardly fail to cause great suffering. Here, they lie patiently in rows, among the straw, with their stolid faces and inexpressive eyes, superintended by men and women, boys, and girls; here they are inspected by our friends, the butchers, bargained for, and bought. Plenty of time; plenty of room; plenty of good humor. "Monsieur François in the bear-skin, how do you do, my friend? You come from Paris by the train? The fresh air does you good. If you are in want of three or four fine calves this market morning, my angel, I Madame Doche, shall be happy to deal with you. Behold these calves, Monsieur François! Great Heaven, you are doubtful! Well, sir, walk round and look about you. If you find better for the money, buy them. If not come to me?" Monsieur François goes his way leisurely, and keeps a wary eye upon the stock. No other butcher jostles Monsieur François; Monsieur François jostles no other butcher. Nobody is flustered and aggravated. Nobody is savage. In the midst of the country blue frocks and red handkerchiefs, and the butchers' coats, shaggy, furry, and hairy; of calf-skin, cow-skin, horse-skin, and bear-skin: towers a cocked hat and a blue cloak. Slavery! For our police wear great-coats and glazed hats.

But now the bartering is over, and the calves are sold. "Ho! Grégorie, Antoine, Jean, Louis! Bring up the carts, my children! Quick brave infants! Hola! Hi!"

The carts, well littered with straw, are backed up to the edge of the raised pavement, and various hot infants carry calves upon their heads, and dexterously pitch them in, while other hot infants, stand in the carts, arrange the calves, and pack them carefully in straw. Here is a promising young calf not sold, whom Madame Doche unbinds. Pardon me, Madame Doche, but I fear this mode of tying the four legs of a quadruped together, though strictly a la mode, is not quite right. You observe, Madame Doche, that the cord leaves deep indentations in the skin, and that the animal is so cramped at first as not to know, or even remotely suspect that he is unbound, until you are so obliging as to kick him, in your delicate little way, and pull his tail like a bell-rope. Then, he staggers to his knees, not being able to stand, and stumbles about like a drunken calf, or the horse at Franconis', whom you may have seen, Madame Doche, who is supposed to have been mortally wounded in battle. But, what is this rubbing against me, as I apostrophize Madame Doche? It is another heated infant with a calf upon his head. "Pardon, monsieur, but will you have the politeness to allow me to pass?" "Ah, sir, willingly. I am vexed to obstruct the way." On he staggers, calf and all, and makes no allusion whatever either to my eyes or limbs.

Now the carts are all full. More straw, my Antoine, to shake over these top rows; then, off we will clatter, rumble, jolt, and rattle, a long row of us, out of the first town-gate, and out at the second town-gate, and past the empty sentry-box, and the little thin square bandbox of a guard-house, where nobody seems to live; and away for Paris, by the paved road, lying, a straight, straight line, in the long, long avenue of trees. We can neither choose our road, nor our pace, for that is all prescribed to us. The public convenience demands that our carts should get to Paris by such a route, and no other (Napoleon had leisure to find that out, while he had a little war with the world upon his hands) and woe betide us if we infringe orders.

Droves of oxen stand in the cattle market, tied to iron bars fixed into posts of granite. Other droves advance slowly down the long avenue, past the second town-gate, and the first town-gate, and the sentry-box, and the bandbox, thawing the morning with their smoky breath as they come along. Plenty of room; plenty of time. Neither man nor beast is driven out of his wits by coaches, carts, wagons, omnibuses, gigs, chaises, phaetons, cabs, trucks, boys, whoopings, roarings and multitudes. No tail-twising is necessary—no iron pronging is necessary. There are no iron prongs here. The market for cattle is held as quietly as the market for calves. In due time off the cattle go to Paris; the drovers can no more choose their road nor their time, nor the numbers they shall drive, than they can choose their hour for dying in the course of nature.

Sheep next. The sheep-pens are up here, past the Branch Bank of Paris, established for the convenience of the butchers, and behind the two pretty fountains they are making the market. My name is Bull; yet I think I should like to see as good twin fountains—not to say in Smithfield, but in England anywhere. Plenty of room; plenty of time. And here are sheep-dogs, sensible as ever, but with a certain French air about them—not without a suspicion of dominoes—with a kind of flavor of mustache and beard—demonstrative dogs, shaggy and loose where an English dog would be tight and close—not so troubled with business calulations as our English drovers' dogs, who have always got their sheep upon their minds, and think about their work, even resting, as you may see by their faces; but, dashing, showy, rather unreliable dogs: who might worry me instead of their legitimate charges if they saw occasion—and might see it somewhat suddenly.

The market for sheep passes off like the other two; and away they go, by their allotted road to Paris. My way being the railway, I make the best of it at twenty miles an hour; whirling through the now high-lighted landscape; thinking that the inexperienced green buds will be wishing, before long, they had not been tempted to come out so soon; and wondering who lives in this or that château, all window and lattice, and what the family may have for breakfast this sharp morning.

After the market comes the abattoir. What abattoir shall I visit first? Montmartre is the largest. So I will go there.

The abattoirs are all within the walls of Paris, with an eye to the receipt of the octroi duty; but they stand in open places in the suburbs, removed form the press and bustle of the city. They are managed by the syndicate or guild of butchers, under the inspection of the police. Certain smaller items of the revenue derived from them are in part retained by the guild for the payement of their expenses, and in part devoted by it to charitable purposes in connection with the trade. They cost 680,000 pounds; and they return to the city of Paris an interest on that outlay, amounting to nearly six and a-half pet cent.

Here, in a sufficiently dismantled space is the abattoir of Montmartre, covering nearly nine acres of ground, surrounded by a high wall, and looking from the outside like a cavalry barrack. At the iron gates is a small functionary in a large cocked hat. "Monsieur desires to see the abattoir? Most certainly." State being inconvenient in private transactions, and monsieur being already aware of the cocked hat, the functionary puts it into a little official bureau which it almost fills, and accompanies me in the modest attire—as to his head—of ordinary life.

Many of the animals from Poissy have come here. On the arrival of each drove, it was turned into yonder ample space, where each butcher who had bought, selected his own purchases. Some, we see now, in these long perspectives of stalls with a high overhanging roof of wood and open tiles rising above the walls. While they rest here, before being slaughtered, they are required to be fed and watered, and the stalls must be kept clean. A stated amount of fodder must always be ready in the loft above; and the supervision is of the strictest kind. The same regulations apply to sheep and calves; for which, portions of these perspectives are strongly railed off. All the buildings are of the strongest and most solid description.

After traversing these lairs, through which besides the upper provision for ventilation just mentioned, there may be a thorough current of air from opposite windows in the side walls, and from doors at either end, we traverse the broad, paved court-yard until we come to the slaughter-houses. They are all exactly alike, and adjoin each other, to the number of eight or nine together, in blocks of solid building. Let us walk into the first.

It is firmly built and paved with stone. It is well lighted, thoroughly aired, and lavishly provided with fresh water. It has two doors opposite each other; the first, the door by which I entered from the main yard; the second, which is opposite, opening on another smaller yard, where the sheep and calves are killed on benches. The pavement of that yard, I see, slopes downward to a gutter, for its being more easily cleansed. The slaughter-house is fifteen feet high, sixteen feet and a-half wide, and thirty-three feet long. It is fitted with a powerful windlass, by which one man at the handle can bring the head of an ox down to the ground to receive the blow from the pole-axe that is to fell him—with the means of raising the carcass and keeping it suspended during the after operation of dressing—and with hooks on which carcasses can hang, when completely prepared, without touching the walls. Upon the pavement of this first stone chamber, lies an ox scarcely dead. If I except the blood draining from him, into a little stone well in the corner of the pavement, the place is free from offense as the Place de la Concorde. It is infinitely purer and cleaner, I know, my friend the functionary, than the Cathedral of Notre Dame. Ha, ha! Monsieur is pleasant, but, truly, there is reason, too, in what he says.

I look into another of these slaughter-houses. "Pray enter," says a gentleman in bloody boots. "This is a calf I have killed this morning. Having a little time upon my hands, I have cut and punctured this lace pattern in the coats of his stomach. It is pretty enough. I did it to divert myself." "It is beautiful, Monsieur, the slaughterer!" He tells me I have the gentility to say so.

I look into rows of slaughter-houses. In many, retail dealers, who have come here for the purpose, are making bargains for meat. There is killing enough, certainly, to satiate an unused eye; and there are steaming carcasses enough, to suggest the expediency of a fowl and salad for dinner; but, everywhere, there is an orderly, clean, well-systematized routine of work in progress—horrible work at the best, if you please; but so much the greater reason why it should be made the best of. I don't know (I think I have observed, my name is Bull), that a Parisian of the lowest order is particularly delicate, or that his nature is remarkable for an infinitesimal infusion of ferocity; but, I do know, my potent, grave, and common counseling Signors, that he is forced, when at this work, to submit himself to a thoroughly good system, and to make an Englishman very heartily ashamed of you.

Here, within the walls of the same abattoir, in other roomy and commodious buildings, are a place for converting the fat into tallow and packing it for market—a place for cleansing and scalding calves' heads and sheep's feet—a place for preparing tripe—stables and coach-houses for the butchers—innumerable conveniences, aiding in the diminution of offensiveness to its lowest possible point, and the raising of cleanliness and supervision to their highest. Hence, all the meat that goes out of the gate is sent away in clean covered carts. And if every trade connected with the slaughtering of animals were obliged by law to be carried on in the same place, I doubt, my friend, now reinstated in the cocked hat (whose civility these two francs imperfectly acknowledge, but appear munificently to repay), whether there could be better regulations than those which are carried out at the Abattoir of Montmartre. Adieu, my friend, for I am away to the other side of Paris, to the Abattoir of Grenelle! And there I find exactly the same thing on a smaller scale, with the addition of a magnificent Artesian well, and a different sort of conductor, in the person of a neat little woman with neat little eyes, and a neat little voice, who picks her neat little way among the bullocks in a very neat little pair of shoes and stockings.

Such is the monument of French Folly which a foreigneering people have erected, in a national hatred and antipathy for common counseling wisdom. That wisdom, assembled in the City of London, having distinctly refused, after a debate of three days long, and by a majority of nearly seven to one, to associate itself with any Metropolitan cattle-market unless it be held in the midst of the city, it follows that we shall lose the inestimable advantages of common counseling protection, and be thrown, for a market, on our own wretched resources. In all human probability we shall thus come, at last, to erect a monument of folly very like this French monument. If that be done, the consequences are obvious. The leather trade will be ruined, by the introduction of American timber, to be manufactured into shoes for the fallen English; the Lord Mayor will be required, by the popular voice, to live entirely on frogs; and both these changes will (how, is not at present quite clear, but certainly somehow or other) fall on that unhappy landed interest which is always being killed, yet is always found to be alive—and kicking.

A CHRISTMAS TREE.

I HAVE been looking on, this evening, at a merry company of children assembled round the pretty German toy, a Christmas tree. The tree was planted in the middle of a great round table, and towered high above their heads. It was brilliantly lighted by a multitude of little tapers; and everywhere sparkled and glittered with bright objects. There were rosy-cheeked dolls, hiding behind the green leaves; and there were real watches (with movable hands, at least, and an endless capacity of being wound up) dangling from innumerable twigs; there were French-polished tables, chairs, bedsteads, wardrobes, eight-day clocks, and various other articles of domestic furniture (wonderfully made, in tin, at Wolverhampton), perched among the boughs, as if in preparation for some fairy house-keeping; there were jolly, broad faced-little men. much more agreeable in appearance than many real men —and no wonder, for their heads took off, and showed them to be full of sugar-plums; there were fiddles and drums; there were tambourines, books, work-boxes, paint-boxes, sweetmeat-boxes, peep-show boxes, and all kinds of boxes; there were trinkets for the elder girls, far brighter than any grown-up gold and jewels; there were baskets and pincushions in all devices; there were guns, swords, and banners; there were witches standing in enchanted rings of pasteboard, to tell fortunes; there were teetotums, humming-tops, needle-cases, pen-wipers, smelling-bottles, conversation-cards, boquet-holders, real fruit, made artificially dazzling with gold leaf; imitation apples, pears, and walnuts, crammed with surprises; in short, as a pretty child, before me, delightedly whispered to another pretty child, her bosom friend, "There was everything, and more." This motley collection of odd objects, clustering on the tree like magic fruit, and flashing back the bright looks directed towards it from every side—some of the diamond-eyes admiring it were hardly on a level with the table, and a few were languishing in timid wonder on the bosoms of pretty mothers, aunts, and nurses—made a lively realization of the fancies of childhood; and set me thinking how all the trees that grow, and all the things that come into existence on the earth, have their wild adornments at that well-remembered time.

Being now at home again, and alone, the only person in the house awake, my thoughts are drawn back, by a fascination which I do not care to resist, to my own childhood. I begin to consider, what do we all remember best upon the branches of the Christmas tree of our own young Christmas days, by which we climbed to real life.

Straight, in the middle of the room, cramped in the freedom of its growth by no encircling walls or soon-reached ceiling, a shadowy tree arises; and, looking up into the dreamy brightness of its top—for I observe in this tree the singular property that it appears to grow downward towards the earth—I look into my youngest Christmas recollections!

All toys at first, I find. Up yonder, among the green holly and red berries, is the tumbler with his hands in his pockets, who wouldn't lie down, but whenever he was put upon the floor, persisted in rolling his fat body about, until he rolled himself still, and brought those lobster eyes of his to bear upon me—when I affected to laugh very much, but in my heart of hearts was extremely doubtful of him. Close beside him is that infernal snuff-box, out of which there sprang a demoniacal counselor in a black gown, with an obnoxious head of hair, and a red cloth mouth, wide open, who was not to be endured on any terms, but could not be put away either; for he used suddenly, in a highly magnified state, to fly of mammoth snuff-boxes in dreams, when least expected. Nor is the frog with cobbler's wax on his tail, far off; for there was no knowing where he wouldn't jump; and when he flew over the candle, and came upon one's hand with that spotted back—red on a green ground—he was horrible. The cardboard lady in a blue-silk skirt, who was stood up against the candlestick to dance, and whom I see on the same branch, was milder, and was beautiful; but I can't say as much for the larger card-board man, who used to be hung against the wall and pulled by a string; there was a sinister expression in that nose of his; and when he got his legs round his neck (which he very often did), he was ghastly, and not a creature to be alone with.

When did that dreadful mask first look at me? Who put it on, and why was I so frightened that the sight of it is an era in my life? It is not a hideous visage in itself; it is even meant to be droll; why then were its stolid features so intolerable? Surely not because it hid the wearer's face. An apron would have done as much; and though I should have preferred even the apron away, it would not have been absolutely insupportable, like the mask. Was it the immovability of the mask? The doll's face was immovable, but I was not afraid of her. Perhaps that fixed and set change coming over a real face, infused into my quickened heart some remote suggestion and dread of the universal change that is to come on every face, and make it still? Nothing reconciled me to it. No drummers, from whom proceeded a melancholy chirping on the turning of a handle; no regiment of soldiers, with a mute band, taken out of a box, and fitted, one by one upon a stiff and lazy little set of lazy-tongs; no old woman, made of wires and a brown-paper composition, cutting up a pie for two small children; could give me a permanent comfort, for a long time. Nor was it any satisfaction to be shown the mask, and see that it was made of paper, or to have it locked up and be assured that no one wore it. The mere recollection of that fixed face, the mere knowledge of its existence anywhere, was sufficient to awake me in the night all perspiration and horror, with, "O I know it's coming! O the mask!"

I never wondered what the dear old donkey with the panniers—there he is!—was made of, then! His hide was real to the touch, I recollect. And the great black horse with the round red spots all over him—the horse that I could even get upon—I never wondered what had brought him to that strange condition, or thought that such a horse was not commonly seen at Newmarket. The four horses of no color, next to him, that went into the wagon of cheeses, and could be taken out and stabled under the piano, appear to have bits of fur-tippet for their tails, and other bits for their manes, and to stand on pegs instead of legs, but it was not so when they were brought home for a Christmas present. They were all right, then; neither was their harness unceremoniously nailed into their chests, as appears to be the case now. The tinkling works of the music cart, I did find out, to be made of quill tooth-picks and wire; and I always thought that little tumbler in his shirt sleeves, perpetually swarming up one side of a wooden frame, and coming down, head foremost, on the other, rather a weak-minded person—though good-natured; but the Jacob's Ladder, next him, made of little squares of red wood, that went flapping and clattering over one another, each developing a different picture, and the whole enlivened by small bells, was a mighty marvel and a great delight.

Ah! The doll's house! of which I was not proprietor, but where I visited. I don't admire the Houses of Parliament half so much as that stone-fronted mansion with real glass windows, and door-steps, and a real balcony—greener than I ever see now, except at watering-places;

and even they afford but a poor imitation. And though it did open all at once, the entire house-front (which was a blow, I admit, as canceling the fiction of a staircase), it was but to shut it up again, and I could believe. Even open, there were three distinct rooms in it; a sitting-room and bed-room, elegantly furnished, and best of all, a kitchen, with uncommonly soft fire-irons, a plentiful assortment of diminutive utensils—oh, the warming-pan! —and a tin man-cook in profile, who was always going to fry two fish. What Barmecide justice have I done to the noble feasts wherein the set of wooden platters figured, each with its own peculiar delicacy, as a ham or turkey, glued tight on to it, and garnished with something green, which I recollect as moss! Could all the temperance societies of these latter days, united, give me such a tea-drinking as I have had through the means of yonder little set of blue crockery, which really would hold liquid (it ran out of the small wooden cask, I recollect, and tasted of matches,) and which made tea, nectar. And if the two leg of the ineffectual little sugar-tongs did tumble over one another, and want purpose, like Punch's hand, what does it matter? And if I did once shriek out, as a poisoned child, and strike the fashionable company with consternation, by reason of having drunk a little teaspoon, inadvertently dissolved in too hot tea, I was never the worse for it, expect by a powder.

Upon the next branches of the tree, lower down, hard by the green roller and miniature gardening-tools, how thick the books begin to hang. Thin books, in themselves, at first, but many of them, and with deliciously smooth covers of bright red or green. What fat black letters to begin with! "A was an archer, and shot a frog." Of course he was. He was an apple-pie also, and there he is! He was a good many things in his time, was A, and so were most of his friends, except X, who had so little versatility, that I never knew him to get beyond Xerxes or Xantippe—like Y, who was always confined to a yacht or a yew tree; and Z condemned for ever to be a zebra or a zany. But, now, the very tree itself changes, and becomes a bean-stalk—the marvelous bean-stalk up which Jack climbed to the Giant's house! And now, those dreadfully interesting, double-headed giants, with their clubs over their shoulders, begin to stride along the boughs in a perfect throng, dragging knights and ladies home for dinner by the hair of their heads. And Jack—how noble, with his sword of sharpness, and his shoes of swiftness! Again those old meditations come upon me as I gaze up at him; and I debate within myself whether there was more than one Jack (which I am loth to believe possible), or only one genuine original admirable Jack, who achieved all the recorded exploit.

Good for Christmas time is the ruddy color of the cloak in which—the tree making a forest of itself for her to trip through, with her basket—Little Red Riding-Hood comes to me one Christmas Eve to give me information of the cruelty and treachery of that dissembling wolf who ate her grandmother, without making any impression on his appetite, and he ate her, after making that ferocious joke about his teeth. She was my first love. I felt that if I could have married Little Red Riding-Hood, I should have known perfect bliss. But, it was not to be; and there was nothing for it but to look out the wolf in the Noah's Ark there, and put him late in the procession on the table, as a monster who was to be degraded. Oh, the wonderful Noah's Ark! It was not found seaworthy when put in a washing-tub, and the animals were crammed in at the roof, and needed to have their legs well shaken down before they could be got in, even there—and then, ten to one but they began to tumble out at the door, which was but imperfectly fastened with a wire latch—but what was that against it! Consider the noble fly, a size or two smaller than the elephant; the lady-bird, the butterfly—all triumphs of art! Consider the goose, whose feet were so small, and whose balance was so indifferent, that he usually tumbled forward, and knocked down all the animal creation. Consider Noah and his family, like idiotic tobacco stoppers; and how the leopard stuck to warm little fingers; and how the tails of the larger animals used gradually to resolve themselves into frayed bits of string!

Hush! Again a forest, and somebody up in a tree—not Robin Hood, not Valentine, not the Yellow Dwarf (I have passed him and all Mother Bunch's wonders, without mention), but an Easter king with a glittering scimitar and turban. By Allah! two Eastern kings, for I see another, looking over his shoulder! Down upon the grass, at the tree's foot, lies the full length of a coal black giant, stretched asleep, with his head in a lady's lap; and near them is a glass box, fastened with four blocks of shining steel, in which he keeps the lady prisoner when he is awake. I see the four keys at his girdle now. The lady makes signs to the two kings in the tree, who softly descend. It is the setting-in of the bright Arabian Nights.

Oh, now all common things become uncommon and enchanted to me. All lamps are wonderful; all rings are talismans. Common flower-pots are full of treasure, with a little earth scattered on the top; trees are for Ali Baba to hide in; beef-steaks are to throw down into the Valley of Diamonds, that the precious stones may stick to them, and be carried by the eagles to their nests, whence the traders, with loud cries, will scare them. Tarts are made, according to the recipe of the vizier's son of Bussorah, who turned pastry cook after he was set down in his drawers at the gate of Damascus; cobblers are all mustaphas, and in the habit of sewing up people cut into four pieces, to whom they are taken blindfold.

Any iron ringlet let into stone is the entrance to a cave which only waits for the magician, and the little fire, and the necromancy, that will make the earth shake. All the dates imported come from the same tree as that unlucky date, with whose shell the merchant knocked out the eye of the genie's invisible son. All olives are of the stock of that fresh fruit, concerning which the Commander of the Faithful overheard the boy conduct the fictitious trial of the fraudulent olive merchant; all apples are akin to the apple purchased (with two others) from the sultan's gardener for three sequins, and which the tall black slave stole from the child. All dogs are associated with the dog, really a transformed man, who jumped upon the baker's counter, and put his paw on the piece of bad money. All rice recalls the rice which the awful lady, who was a ghoule, could only peck by grains, because of her nightly feasts in the burial-place. My very rocking-horse—there he is, with his nostrils turned completely inside out, indicative of blood!—should have a peg in his neck, by virtue thereof to fly away with me, as the wooden horse did with the Prince of Persia, in the sight of all his father's court.

Yes, on every object that I recognize among those upper branches of my Christmas tree, I see this fairy light! When I wake in bed, at daybreak, on the cold, dark winter mornings, and the white snow dimly beheld, outside, through the frost on the window pane, I hear Dinarzade. "Sister, sister, if you are yet awake, I pray you finish the history of the Young King of the Black Islands" Scheherazade replies, "If my lord the sultan will suffer me to live another day, sister, I will not only finish that, but tell you a more wonderful story yet." Then, the gracious sultan goes out, giving no orders for the execution, and we all three breathe again.

At this height of my tree I begin to see, cowering among the leaves—it may be born of turkey, or of pudding, or mince pie, or of these many fancies, jumbled with Robinson Crusoe on his desert island, Philip Quarll among the monkeys, Sandford and Merton with Mr. Barlow, Mother Bunch, and the mask—or it may be the result of indigestion, assisted by imagination and over-doctoring—a prodigious nightmare. It is so exceedingly indistinct, that I don't know why it's frightful—but I know it is. I can only make out that it is an immense array of shapeless things, which appear to be planted on a vast exaggeration of the lazy-tongs that used to bear the toy soldiers, and to be slowly coming close to my eyes, and receding to an immeasurable distance. When it comes closest, it is worst. In connection with it I descry remembrances of winter nights incredibly long; of being sent early to bed, as a punishment for some small offense, and waking in two hours, with a sensation of having been asleep two nights; of the laden hopelessness of morning ever dawning; and the oppression of a weight of remorse.

And now, I see a wonderful row of little lights rise smoothly out of the ground, before a vast green curtain. Now, a bell rings—a magic bell, which still sounds in my ears unlike all other bells—and music plays, amidst a buzz of voices, and a fragrant smell of orange-peel and oil. Anon, the magic bell commands the music to cease, and the great green curtain rolls itself up majestically, and the play begins! The devoted dog of Montargis avenges the death of his master, foully murdered in the Forest of Bondy; and a humorous peasant with a red nose and a very little hat, whom I take from this hour forth to my bosom as a friend (I think he was a waiter or an hostler at a village inn, but many years have passed since he and I have met), remarks that the sassigassity of that dog is indeed surprising; and evermore this jocular conceit will live in my remembrance fresh and unfading, overtopping all possible jokes, unto the end of time. Or now, I learn with bitter tears how poor Jane Shore, dressed all in white, and with her brown hair hanging down, went starving through the streets; or how George Barnwell killed the worthiest uncle that ever man had, and was afterwards so sorry for it that he ought to have been let off. Comes swift to comfort me, the Pantomime—stupendous phenomenon!—when clowns are shot from loaded mortars into the great chandelier, bright constellation that it is; when harlequins, covered all over with scales of pure gold twist and sparkle, like amazing fish; when Pantaloon (whom I deem it no irreverence to compare in my own mind to my grandfather) puts red-hot pokers in his pocket, and cries "Here's somebody coming!" or taxes the clown with petty larceny, by saying, "Now, I sawed you do it!" when everything is capable, with the greatest ease, of being changed into anything; and "nothing is, but thinking makes it so." Now, too, I perceive my first experience of the dreary sensation—often to return in after-life—of being unable, next day, to get back to the dull, settled world; of wanting to live forever in the bright atmosphere I have quitted; of doting on the little fairy, with the wand like a celestial barber's pole, and pining for a fairy immortality along with her. Ah, she comes back, in many shapes, as my eye wanders down the branches of my Christmas tree, and goes as often, and has never yet stayed by me!

Out of this delight springs the toy-theatre—there it is, with its familiar proscenium, and ladies in feathers, in the boxes!—and all its attendant occupation with paste and glue, and gum, and water colors, in the getting-up of the miller and his men, and Elizabeth or the exile of Siberia. In spite of a few besetting accidents and failures (particularly an unreasonable disposition in the respectable Kelmar, and some others, to become faint in the legs, and double up, at exciting points of the drama), a teeming world of fancies so suggestive and all-embracing, that, far below it on my Christmas tree, I see dark, dirty, real theatres in the day-time, adorned with these associations as with the freshest garlands of the rarest flowers, and charming me yet.

But hark ! The Waits are playing, and they break my childish sleep ! What images do I associate with the Christmas music as I see them set forth on the Christmas tree ? Known before all the others, keeping far apart from all the others, they gather round my little bed. An angel, speaking to a group of shepherds in a field ; some travelers, with eyes uplifted, following a star ; a baby in a manger ; a child in a spacious temple, talking with grave men ; a solemn figure, with a mild and beautiful face, raising a dead girl by the hand ; again, near a city gate, calling back the son of a widow, on his bier, to life ; a crowd of people looking through the opened roof of a chamber where he sits, and letting down a sick person on a bed, with ropes ; the same, in a tempest, walking on the water to a ship ; again, on a seashore, teaching a great multitude; again, with a child upon his knee, and other children round ; again, restoring sight to the blind, speech to the dumb, hearing to the deaf, health to the sick, strength to the lame, knowledge to the ignorant; again, dying upon a cross, watched by armed soldiers, a thick darkness coming on, the earth beginning to shake, and only one voice heard, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Still, on the lower and maturer branches of the tree, Christmas associations cluster thick. School-books shut up ; Ovid and Virgil silenced ; the Rule of Three, with its cool impertinent inquiries, long disposed of ; Terence and Plautus acted no more, in an arena of huddled desks and forms, all chipped, and notched, and inked ; cricket-bats, stumps, and balls, left higher up, with the smell of trodden grass and the softened noise of shouts in the evening air; the tree is still fresh, still gay. If I no more come home at Christmas time, there will be boys and girls (thank Heaven !) while the world lasts ; and they do ! Yonder they dance and play upon the branches of my tree, God bless them, merrily, and my heart dances and plays, too.

And I do come home at Christmas. We all do, or we all should. We all come home, or ought to come home, for a short holiday—the longer the better—from the great boarding-school, where we are forever working at our arithmetical slates, to take, and give a rest. As to going a visiting, where can we not go, if we will; where have we not been, when we would; starting our fancy from our Christmas tree!

Away into the winter prospect. There are many such upon the tree! On, by low-lying, misty grounds, through fens and fogs, up long hills, winding dark as caverns between thick plantations, almost shutting out the sparkling stars; so, out on broad heights, until we stop at last, with sudden silence at an avenue. The gate-bell has a deep, half-awful sound in the frosty air; the gate swings open on its hinges; and as we drive up to a great house, the glancing lights grow larger in the windows, and the opposing rows of trees seem to fall solemnly back on either side, to give us place. At intervals, all day, a frightened hare has shot across this whitened turf; or the distant clatter of a herd of deer trampling the hard frost, has, for the minute, crushed the silence, too. Their watchful eyes beneath the fern may be shining now, if we could see them, like the icy dewdrops on the leaves; but they are still, and all is still. And so the lights growing larger, and the trees falling back before us, and closing up again behind us, as if to forbid retreat, we come to the house.

There is probably a smell of roasted chestnuts and other good comfortable things all the time, for we are telling winter stories—ghost stories, or more shame for us —round the Christmas fire; and we have never stirred, except to draw a little nearer to it. But, no matter for that. We came to the house, and it is an old house, full of great chimneys where wood is burnt on ancient dogs upon the hearth, and grim portraits (some of them with grim legends, too) lower distrustfully from the oaken panels of the wall. We are a middle-aged nobleman, and we make a generous supper with our host and hostess and their guests—it being Christmas-time, and the old house full of company—and then we go to bed. Our room is a very old room. It is hung with tapestry. We don't like the portrait of a cavalier in green, over the fireplace. There are great black beams in the ceiling, and there is a great black bedstead, supported at the foot by two great black figures, who seem to have come off a couple of tombs in the old baronial church in the park, for our particular accommodation. But, we are not a superstitious nobleman, and we don't mind. Well! we dismiss our servant, lock the door, and sit before the fire in our dressing-gown, musing about a great many things. At length we go to bed. Well! we can't sleep. We toss and tumble, and can't sleep. The embers on the hearth burn fitfully and make the room look ghostly. We can't help peeping out over the counterpane, at the two black figures and the cavalier—that wicked-looking cavalier—in green. In the flickering light they seem to advance and retire; which, though we are not by any means a superstitious nobleman, is not agreeable. Well! we get nervous—more and more nervous. We say "This is very foolish, but we can't stand this; we'll pretend to be ill, and knock up somebody." Well! we are just going to do it, when the locked door opens, and there comes in a young woman, deadly pale, and with long, fair hair, who glides to the fire, and sits down in the chair we have left there, wringing her hands. Then, we notice that her clothes are wet. Our tongue cleaves to the roof of our mouth, and we can't speak; but, we observe her accurately. Her clothes are wet; her long hair is dabbled with moist mud; she is dressed in the fashion of two hundred years ago; and she has at her girth a bunch of rusty keys. Well! there she sits, and we can't even faint, we are in such a state about it. Presently she gets up, and tries all the locks in the room with the rusty keys, which won't fit one of them; then, she fixes her eyes on the portrait of the cavalier in green, and says, in a low, terrible voice, "The stags know it!" After that, she wrings her hands again, passes the bedside, and goes out at the door. We hurry on our dressing-gown, seize our pistols (we always travel with pistols), and are following, when we find the door locked. We turn the key, look out into the dark gallery; no one there. We wander away, and try to find our servant. Can't be done. We pace the gallery till daybreak; then return to our deserted room, fall asleep, and are awakened by our servant (nothing ever haunts him) and the shining sun! Well! we make a wretched breakfast, and all the company say we look queer. After breakfast, we go over the house with our host, and then we take him to the portrait of the cavalier in green, and then it all comes out. He was false to a young housekeeper once attached to that family, and famous for her beauty, who drowned herself in a pond, and whose body was discovered, after a long time, because the stags refused to drink of the water. Since which, it has been whispered that she traverses the house at midnight (but goes especially to that room where the cavalier in green was wont to sleep), trying the old locks with the rusty keys. Well! we tell our host of what we have seen, and a shade comes over his features, and he begs it may be hushed up; and so it is. But, it's all true; and we said so, before we died (we are dead now) to many responsible people.

There is no end to the old houses, with resounding galleries, and dismal state-bedchambers, and haunted wings shut up for many years, through which we may ramble, with an agreeable creeping up our back, and encounter any number of ghosts, but (it is worthy of remark perhaps) reducible to a very few general types and classes; for, ghosts have little originality, and "walk" in a beaten track. Thus, it comes to pass, that a certain room in a certain old hall, where a certain bad lord, baronet, knight, or gentleman shot himself, has certain planks in the floor from which the blood will not be taken out. You may scrape and scrape, as the present owner has done, or plane and plane, as his father did, or scrub and scrub, as his grandfather did, or burn and burn with strong acids, as his great-grandfather did, but, there the blood will still be—no redder and no paler—no more and no less—always just the same. Thus, in such another house there is a haunted door, that never will keep open; or another door that never will keep shut; or a haunted sound of a spinning-wheel, or a hammer, or a footstep, or a cry, or a sigh, or a horse's tramp, or the rattling of a chain. Or else, there is a turret-clock, which, at the midnight hour, strikes thirteen when the head of the family is going to die; or a shadowy, immovable black carriage which at such a time is always seen by somebody, waiting near the great gates in the stable-yard. Or thus, it came to pass how Lady Mary went to pay a visit at a large wild house in the Scottish Highlands, and, being fatigued with her long journey, retired to bed early, and innocently said, next morning, at the breakfast-table, "How odd, to have so late a party last night, in this remote place, and not to tell me of it, before I went to bed!"

Then, everyone asked Lady Mary what she meant? Then, Lady Mary replied, "Why, all night long, the carriages were driving round and round the terrace, underneath my window!" Then, the owner of the house turned pale, as so did his lady, and Charles Macdoodle of Macdoodle signed to Lady Mary to say no more, and every one was silent. After breakfast, Charles Macdoodle told Lady Mary that it was a tradition in the family that those rumbling carriages on the terrace betokened death. And so it proved, for, two months afterwards, the lady of the mansion died. And Lady Mary, who was a maid of honor at court, often told this story to the old Queen Charlotte; by this token that the old King always said, "Eh, eh? What, what? Ghosts, ghosts? No such thing, no such thing!" And never left off saying so, until he went to bed.

Or, a friend of somebody's whom most of us know, when he was a young man at college, had a particular friend, with whom he made the compact that, if it were possible for the spirit to return to this earth after its separation from the body, he of the twain who first died. should reappear to the other. In course of time, this compact was forgotten by our friend; the two young men having progressed in life, and taken diverging paths that were wide asunder. But, one night many years afterwards, our friend being in the north of England, and staying for the night in an inn, on the Yorkshire moors, happened to look out of bed; and there, in the moonlight, leaning on a bureau near the window, steadfastly regarding him, saw his old college friend! The appearance being solemnly addressed, replied, in a kind of whisper, but very audibly, "Do not come near me. I am dead. I am here to redeem my promise. I come from another world, but may not disclose its secrets!" Then, the whole form becoming paler, melted, as it were, into the moonlight, and faded away.

Or, there was the daughter of the first occupier of the picturesque Elizabethan house, so famous in our neighborhood. You have heard about her? No! Why, she went out one summer evening at twilight, when she was a beautiful girl, just seventeen years of age, to gather flowers in the garden; and presently came running, terrified, into the hall to her father, saying, "O, dear father, I have met myself!" He took her in his arms, and told her it was fancy, but she said, "Oh no! I met myself in the broad walk, and I was pale and gathering withered flowers, and I turned my head, and held them up!" And, that night, she died; and a picture of her story was begun, though never finished, and they say it is somewhere in the house to this day, with its face to the wall.

Or, the uncle of my brother's wife was riding home on horseback, one mellow evening at sunset, when, in a green lane close to his own house he saw a man standing before him, in the very center of the narrow way. "Why does that man in the cloak stand there!" he thought. "Does he want me to ride over him?" But the figure never moved. He felt a strange sensation at seeing it so still, but slackened his trot and rode forward. When he was so close to it, as almost to touch it with his stirrup, his horse shied, and the figure glided up the bank, in a curious, unearthly, manner—backward, and without seeming to use its feet—and was gone. The uncle of my brother's wife, exclaiming, "Good Heaven! It's my cousin Harry, from Bombay!" put spurs to his horse, which was suddenly in a profuse sweat, and, wondering at such strange behavior, dashed round to the front of his house. There, he saw the same figure, just passing in at the long French window of the drawing-room, opening on the ground. He threw his bridle to a servant, and hastened in after it. His sister was sitting there, alone. "Alice, where's my cousin Harry?" "Your cousin Harry, John?" "Yes. From Bombay. I met him in the lane just now, and saw him enter here, this instant." Not a creature had been seen by any one; and in that hour and minute, as it afterwards appeared, this cousin died in India.

Or, it was a certain sensible old maiden lady, who died at ninety-nine, and retained her faculties to the last, who really did see the orphan boy; a story which has often been incorrectly told, but, of which the real truth is this —because it is, in fact, a story belonging to our family— and she was a connection of our family. When she was about forty years of age, and still an uncommonly fine woman (her lover died young, which was the reason why she never married, though she had many offers), she went to stay at a place in Kent, which her brother, an Indian merchant, had newly bought. There was a story that this place had once been held in trust, by the guardian of a young boy; who was himself the next heir, and who killed the young boy by harsh and cruel treatment. She knew nothing of that. It has been said that there was a cage in her bed-room in which the guardian used to put the boy. There was no such thing. There was only a closet. She went to bed, made no alarm whatever in the night, and in the morning said composedly to her maid when she came in, "Who is the pretty, forlorn-looking child who has been peeping out of that closet all night?" The maid replied by giving a loud scream, and instantly decamping. She was surprised; but she was a woman of remarkable strength of mind, and she dressed herself and went down stairs, and closeted herself with her brother. "Now, Walter," she said, "I have been disturbed all night by a pretty, forlorn-looking boy, who has been constantly peeping out of that closet in my room, which I can't open. This is some trick." "I am afraid not, Charlotte," said he, "for it is the legend of the house. It is the orphan boy. What did he do?" "He opened the door softly," said she, "and peeped out. Sometimes, he came a step or two into the room. Then, I called to him, to encourage him, and he shrunk and shuddered and crept in again and shut the door." "The closet has no communication, Charlotte," said her brother, "with any other part of the house, and it's nailed up." This was undeniably true and it took two carpenters a whole forenoon to get it open for examination. Then she was satisfied that she had seen the orphan boy. But the wild and terrible part of the story is, that he was also seen by three of her brother's sons, in succession, who all died young. On the occasion of each child being taken ill, he came home in a heat, twelve hours before, and said, Oh, Mamma, he had been playing under a particular oak-tree, in a certain meadow, with a strange boy—a pretty, forlorn-looking boy, who was very timid, and made signs! From fatal experience, the parents came to know that this was the orphan boy, and that the course of that child whom he chose for his little playmate was surely run.

Legion is the name of the German castles, where we sit up alone to wait for the specter—where we are shown into a room, made comparatively cheerful for our reception—

where we glance round at the shadows, thown on the blank walls by the crackling fire—where we feel very lonely when the village innkeeper and his pretty daughter have retired, after laying down a fresh store of wood upon the hearth, and setting forth on the small table such supper-cheer as a cold roast capon, bread, grapes, and a flask of old Rhine wine—where the reverberting doors close on their retreat, one after another, like so many peals of sullen thunder—and where, about the small hours of the night, we come into the knowledge of divers supernatural mysteries. Legion is the name of the haunted German students, in whose society we draw yet nearer to the fire, while the schoolboy in the corner opens his eyes wide and round, and flies off the footstool he has chosen for his seat, when the door accidently blows open. Vast is the crop of such fruit, shining on our Christmas tree; in blossom, almost at the very top; ripening all down the boughs!

Among the later toys and fancies hanging there—as idle often and less pure—be the images once associated with the sweet old Waits, the softened music in the night, ever unalterable! Encircled by the social thoughts of Christmas time, still let the benignant figure of my childhood stand unchanged! In every image and suggestion that the season brings, may the bright star that rested above the poor roof, be the star of all the Christian world! A moment's pause, O vanishing tree, of which the lower boughs are dark to me as yet, and let me look once more! I know there are blank spaces on thy branches, where eyes that I have loved, have shone and smiled; from which they are departed. But, far above, I see the raiser of the dead girl, and the widow's son; and God is good! If age be hiding for me in the unseen portion of thy downward growth, O may I, with a gray head, turn a child's heart to that figure yet, and a child's trustfulness and confidence!

Now, the tree is decorated with bright merriment, and song, and dance, and cheerfulness. And they are welcome. Innocent and welcome be they ever held, beneath the branches of the Christmas tree, which cast no gloomy shadow! But, as it sinks into the ground, I hear a whisper going through the leaves. "This, in commemoration of the law of love and kindness, mercy and compassion. This, in remembrance of Me!"

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Christmas stories

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